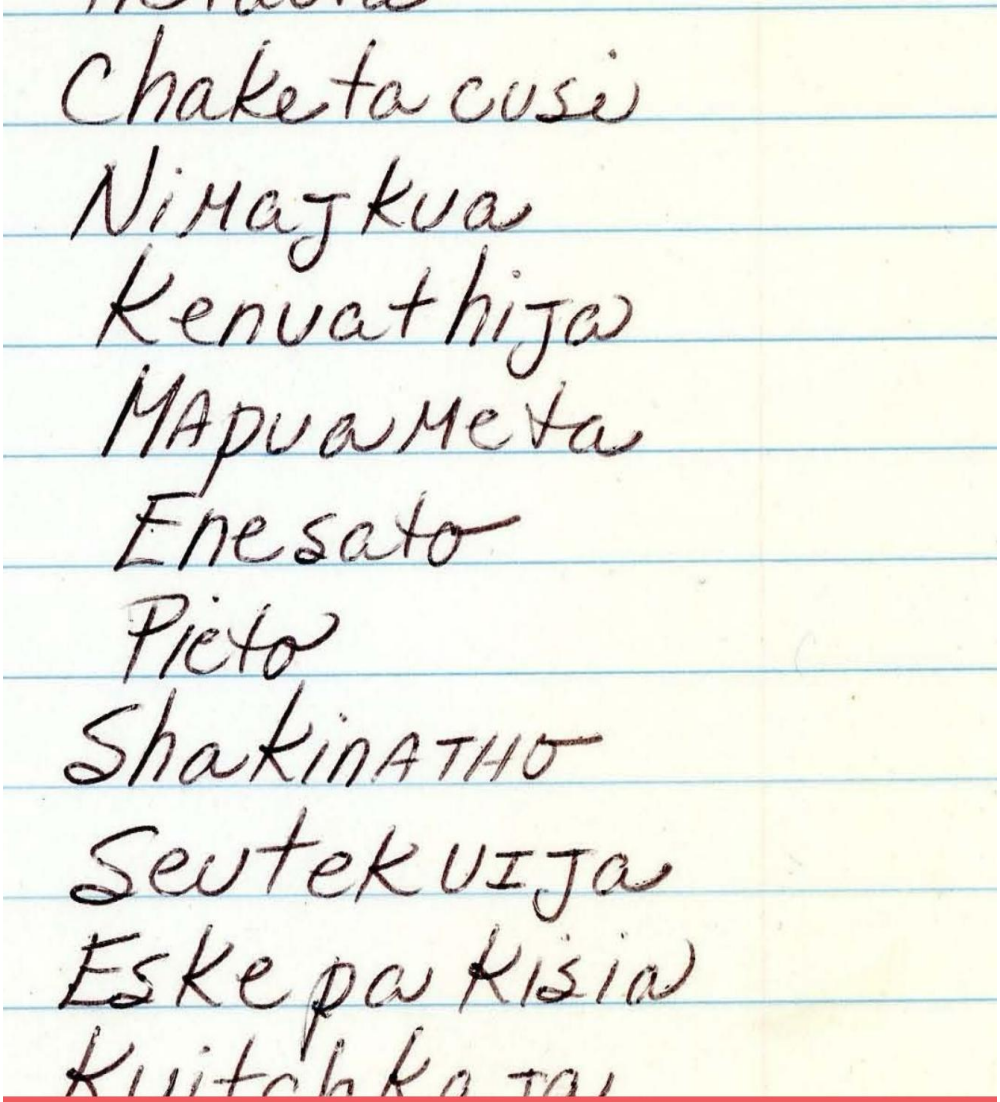

kickapoo juice

aurelio valdez garcia
& jim salvator

KICKAPOO JUICE

Aurelio Valdez Garcia & Jim Salvator

Ekoneskaka (Aurelio Valdez Garcia)

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Proemio

These Kickapoo accounts are stories and sketches from the life of *Ekon-es-kaka* (*Aurelio Valdez Garcia*). They are improvised, blending fiction and nonfiction, based on *Ekon-es-kaka*'s spontaneous testimony recorded in Boulder and Denver, Colorado, and on the road to Eagle Pass, Texas. Many of these accounts also take place across the border in *Coahuila*, Mexico, where the traditional Kickapoo village (*Nacimiento* or *Naci*) is located on the *Río Sabina*.

Some parts of these accounts are second-hand stories I have framed myself, trying to amplify the spirit of *Ekon-es-kaka*'s first-hand testimony.

Like *Ekon-es-kaka*, many Kickapoos today recognize the border area of Texas and *Coahuila* as their homeland, as they have for at least the past 200 years. But how did *Ekon-es-kaka*'s tribe (a woodland people from the Old Northwest) end up in *Coahuila*?

At least as early as the 1800's, if not well before, the Kickapoos began a series of adventures and forced migrations into northern Mexico from their ancestral home in the primeval forests of the Great Lakes. Their forced migrations came in response to unbridled aggression, swindling, and low-down persecution from American settlers and land sharks, who were protected by the Long Knives. (The 'Long Knives' were the American armed forces, so named by the Kickapoos because of their bayonets.)

The migrating Kickapoos had to fight their way through Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and lastly Texas before they could set up their new home in Old Mexico. The Mexican government awarded the Kickapoos 17,000 acres of land in northern *Coahuila* because the tribe's warriors protected the population from raids by Comanches, Apaches, Texans and the proverbial Long Knives, who were often heedless of the international boundary.

Speaking of the Long Knives, in 1873 the MacKenzie Raid smashed *Nacimiento*. Colonel Ranald MacKenzie captured the Kickapoo women and children and brought them back to imprisonment in the United States. His raid was successful only because he struck the Kickapoo village when the warriors were away on a hunting expedition. Was this raid so "long ago" that it doesn't matter anymore?

That is what our American judges prefer to say, along with their other whitewashed rationalizations, like the so-called "Doctrine of Discovery." But is one hundred years truly so *long ago*?

Mackenzie's cowardly and illegal raid took place just one hundred years before I graduated from college. Just one hundred years, from 1873 to 1973, from Mac-Kenzie's Raid to Viet Nam. Over that tumultuous and harrowing century, the Kickapoos persevered in the face of numerous attacks and land swindles, like the big one in 1891. It was the final "free land" rush that took place in Oklahoma. The famous one involving that cherished American icon we know as the *Oklahoma*

Boomers, mythologized *ad nauseum* by Hollywood and venerated *ad infinitum* by historians of the Grand Old West. But what mythic "free land" did the heroic *Boomers* actually obtain?

Their famous "land rush" occurred on the last bits of Kickapoo treaty land while the Kickapoos were conveniently absent. That super-swindle happened just one hundred years before I graduated law school, 1891 to 1991, and lawyers, of course, played a key role in legitimating the *Boomers'* thefts, raking in legal fees and real estate to boot.

So, my personal resumé, for what it's worth, is offered to give you a temporal perspective. In just 100 years, which is about the age of my dear old mother who used to take me to the Forest Preserve and tell me she was pure Indian. "What kind of Indian," I asked. "Algonquin," she replied.

I remember. She was sitting on a low thick branch that angled out over the bank of the Des Plaines River on the outskirts of our suburb in Chicagoland. She had chestnut brown hair and dark-rimmed eyeglasses, and she was wearing a suede jacket the same color as the muddy river flowing beneath her. She was utterly credible.

One hundred years is what it took. From Mackenzie's Raid to when I graduated college, from the last big Oklahoma Land Rush to when I graduated law school. In just such a short span of time the Kickapoos were smashed and swindled, and their primeval forest became the tiny "Forest Preserve," fighting to stay alive beside our toxic city dump, yet the Kickapoos held on.

Ultimately, many Kickapoos survived in northern Mexico. The geographical isolation of the tribe in upper *Coahuila* allowed them to maintain both cultural and linguistic purity. It was only in the 1950's (when a debilitating drought struck *Nacimiento*) that the Kickapoos were forced to enter the tide of so-called undocumented migrant farmworkers that surged north with the growing season and returned home just before the snow. That was how the Kickapoos stayed alive.

In the 1960's and 70's *Ekon-es-kaka* joined up with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW). Yet he and all the migrating Kickapoos from Mexico were still not recognized as United States citizens at the time many of these accounts were finally recorded in the early 1980's. At that time, *Newsweek* magazine glibly referred to the Kickapoos as "the tribe without a country," and I was teaching expository writing as a perennial graduate student at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

That was where I met *Ekon-es-kaka*. He was in one of my classes. I assigned my students the task of writing about their lives, so *Ekon-es-kaka* handed me an excellent story, plagiarized nearly *verbatim* from an autobiographical novel called *Crying Wind*. (Crying Wind is a Kickapoo woman from Kansas who published her own eponymous, original book in 1980.)

It took me a few years before I found out about the plagiarism. One of my shrewdest small magazine publishers found humor in the whole fiasco, reminding me that once again a Kickapoo had outsmarted a white guy. "*Tu es caca*," he told me.

By then *Ekon-es-kaka* and I had travelled to Eagle Pass and *Nacimiento*, and I had recorded a lot of *Ekon-es-kaka* in conversation, letting my mind become a human tape recorder and my eyes a video camera, burning everything I experienced into my fevered brain and merging myself into the project by unwittingly taking parts of Crying Wind's story along with *Ekon-es-kaka*'s testimony and finally coming up with the first drafts of *Kickapoo Juice*, which today still tells you parts of all three of our stories, sometimes fused-up and hopelessly jumbled together.

In our three longer narratives; *Ekon-es-kaka, Chicapoo Juice* and *Mechi-mi-tota,* we use both fact and fiction at will. But some of our shorter accounts are more linear and almost purely non-fiction, as if we were scientists of anthropology, such as in *Granpa, Let's Trade Our Teeth*, *El Mismo Río* and *Cedro*, to cite just three examples. No matter what we have done in *Kickapoo Juice*, we still owe Crying Wind a lot of credit for some of our fiction because she inspired *Ekon-es-kaka* so much he literally copied parts her story and called it his own, and that was how we got started writing together. Along the way we have hopefully corrected all the plagiarism. And we also learned a lot of hard-nosed fact (on the ground and in the library). So, for example, we also owe a lot of credit for some of our historical fiction to Arrell M. Gibson, citing his scholarly work entitled *The Kickapoos: Lords of the Middle Border*. For example, in our third long narrative, *Mechi-mi-tota*, we rely heavily on Chapter 15 (*The Battle of Dove Creek*) from Professor Gibson's book.

I guess in this post-modern world even our petty plagiarisms have some oddball roll to play, or so I am told by literary experts, one of whom considers plagiarism "subversive." If so, it fits right in with us. However, in its current form, we think *Kickapoo Juice* is nothing like *Crying Wind* and nothing like *The Kickapoos: Lords of the Middle Border*. It has its own stories to tell.

So, I can still hear some Kickapoo laughter and see some Kickapoo smiles, enjoying my literary debut and debacle. That is my blessing, but really (to tell the reductionist's truth) sometimes in these stories I am just another white guy, writing in an Indian's voice, smiling like a salesman, colonizing and exploiting as I go, like a malignant disease.

Luckily for me, I was also colonized and exploited by *Ekon-es-kaka* and the Kickapoos. But it was different for me because that was what I wanted to happen. I can't say the same for *Ekon-es-kaka*, Crying Wind or Arrell Gibson, none of whom would likely accept my selective bleedings and fusions of their work.

Kickapoo Juice uses three languages, mostly English, but also Spanish and Kickapoo, switching codes to depict the linguistic reality at hand. This is because *Ekon-es-kaka* (*Aurelio Valdez Garcia*) grew up in *Nacimiento* and later entered the Kickapoo migrant farmworker generation, speaking Kickapoo initially, then Spanish, then English. He graduated from high school in *Muzquiz*, *Coahuila*, which was a unique and unprecedented event among his people. His father, who he refers to as the first lawyer among the Kickapoos of

Nacimiento, forced *Ekon-es-kaka* to attend the Spanish-speaking high school in *Muzquiz* (the Mexican city nearest to the Kickapoo village) when all the other Kickapoo boys were out hunting deer and wild turkey, and when *Ekon-es-kaka* himself barely spoke Spanish.

Like all the Kickapoos of *Nacimiento*, *Ekon-es-kaka* spoke his native dialect fluently, but he knew only a few words of Mexican Spanish as it was spoken in *Coahuila* at that time. Just the same, he graduated from high school in *Muzquiz*. He was the only *Indio Kikapu* in his class. Years later (in the late 1970's and early 1980's) he also attended college and university in both Utah and Colorado through various programs designed to convert him to Mormonism or to assist him as a "migrant farmworker," or both. And so, he studied a lot of English as well, just to survive in *El Norte*.

Ultimately, *Ekon-es-kaka* learned to live in three parallel worlds; the traditional world of the Kickapoos of *Nacimiento*, the migrant farmworker world of the Mexican Kickapoos, and the neocolonial world of the contemporary Kickapoos, partaking (if only possible) of the so-called American Dream. These stories and sketches draw on all three worlds.

Jim Salvator (*Mechi-mi-tota*)
Turtle Island, 2018

Kickapoo Juice

Ekon-es-kaka (*Aurelio Valdez Garcia*)

The spirit of a dead person, if there really is such a thing, is sometimes a little surprised or even angry to find itself no longer part of a real body and a real living family. So, these spirits have been known to cause harm to those around them, and children are especially vulnerable because their hearts and minds are so wide and incredibly open.

The warm youth and great promise of a child are also very attractive. Think of it: How much would you give for a second chance as you lay on your deathbed, breathing your last breath? A spirit may try to jump right inside a child's skin; and once inside, it will make all kinds of trouble. For one thing, it just won't fit, and it may kill the child by accident, trying to squeeze its big old spirit body clean inside that little child's body. I don't know, but I suppose that poor little child might grow purple and burst apart like a fig. Surely, the child will become very ill. That's how angry and jealous those spirits can sometimes be.

You know children; they're growing like little frogs. They don't need to be weighing themselves down with thoughts of rotten flesh. They need to be out playing tag and swimming in the river. All day. Every day. But I've seen a child who was expected to walk right up to an open coffin and gaze into the pasty white face

of a dead relative. That's crazy. I've seen another child who was forced to walk through the sick wards of a hospital to visit a family member who was mostly hacking and coughing and drooling and babbling things no one could understand anyway. That's really crazy. Children don't need or even understand a dying person's final words, and even if they could, they surely don't want their dreams filled with "the last curse of an angry soul as it shucks off the husk of this world."

You see, I learned a little bit about preaching from the Mormons up by Provo, Utah. They were ready to give me a free education, and all I had to do in return was to bring their *Mormone* religion to my Kickapoo people. So, I played along for a while. I needed to live, but more than that, they were sending both me and my wife to the nursing school at Utah Technical College, and that was a good chance for us both just then.

So, I learned how to say a few things like "the soul as it shucks off the husk of this world," and I guess they were pretty impressed because they kept making me better offers. But I never even wanted to bring the Mormon religion to the Kickapoo tribe. That would have been the craziest of all. My people have been staying alive down in *Coahuila* since at least 1850, and you can bet there are more than a few pious Catholics down in that part of the world, but not one of my people has ever tried to bring the Catholic religion to our village in *Nacimiento*. It's not our way, and our neighbors seemed to have learned that. So, I can assure you, even though those *Mormones* tried to tell me that we Kickapoo are one of their Lost Tribes, I would never mention a word

of this to my people, unless I was making a joke. If I were serious, they might just kill me.

It's like this, one time somebody got the bright idea to build us a schoolhouse down there in *Ejidos Morelos*, which is a government farming cooperative neighboring *Nacimiento*. The idea was to get the Kickapoos to go to school. It wasn't the Mormons and it wasn't the Catholics. It was the Government of Mexico that built it, but my people burned that school right down. And the government interfered again, trying to build us a clinic, but again it was burnt to the ground. Now, if there are no schools and no clinics, you can guess why there are no cathedrals and no Mormon Tabernacle Choirs either. But just recently the government did haul in tons of stone and gravel to build us a road, and so far, nobody's complaining, but we don't use that road very much. We sure don't.

Here is what I set out to tell you: Thinking and talking, or even writing about death, can only bring harm to those of us who are still alive. You ever heard of Crying Wind? She wrote her own book about being a Kickapoo. And she is right about some things. She is right when she says we Kickapoo believe that talking about death will only make us sick and weak. And so now, as I write about it, we're really taking our chances, you and me, and you'll probably feel the pressure of trouble and death as you read my story. I know I feel it, but I have no choice. I have plenty of trouble, just as you maybe do. And death is knocking on my door too, because my doctor tells me I have cancer.

We come up the river in the early dark. I'm behind my Uncle Peskituma, and his dogs get strung out in a line behind me, and we cross the spot where I like to go jumping off a big tree on a hot summer day, and sometimes I go out there all night long when the moon gets full, jumping and swimming and fooling around, looking up into the purple sky. But this time of year, the water feels bone cold, rushing and gliding over my thighs. It just about freezes me solid, and I keep thinking of my body trying to get up and walk around with the blood like ice tangling in my veins.

I think it was close to March 22, 1981. I was thirty-five years old, but I didn't want to keep going any longer, or I couldn't. I still didn't know I had cancer. My stomach was burning on fire, like lightning strikes in the little hills of *Nacimiento*. It would just snap and burst and set all the sage burning for days. But the burning sage smelled so good. I wish I could smell it now. I wouldn't mind that. But for some reason everything around me back then was smelling bad, especially bad since we'd moved down from Provo, Utah to Boulder, Colorado. Yes, I was there in Boulder with my wife Mary Sue, and my daughter, Eurika, and sometimes my other daughter, Terry, she was there too. And my family, they all made me real happy. But deep down inside I wasn't feeling too frisky, and I was way too young to be burning so much oil. Yeah, carrying my body around was something I needed a pickup truck to do. I know one thing: I didn't have any torque and my plugs were fouled. I have to say it: who knows, but maybe my

thinking was bad. Maybe what Crying Wind said was really true. By thinking about troubles, I was causing my own sickness. Maybe all my troublesome thinking had something to do with the way I was feeling deep down inside, because my guts, they hurt all the time.

I'd been to the hospital in Denver for so many appointments, complaining about my stomach, and they'd test me this way and they couldn't find anything, and so they'd turn me around and they'd test me the other way, and they couldn't find anything. Then they'd split the difference and test me halfway between this way and that way and they still couldn't find a damn thing wrong anywhere. I believe they thought I was just another drunken Indian, and I don't want to pretend that I'd never taken a drink. Of course I had, and drinking until I was numb seemed to help me as much as anything.

Then those doctors thought maybe I'd been in a whole bunch of fights, and somebody had kicked me real bad in the groin and maybe snapped a chain around my head, making me stupid. Which is not to say I hadn't done my fair share of fighting. Sure, I'd been kicked in the guts. Sure, I'd been whipped with a chain. Yeah, it hurt, it hurt like hell, but that would only make me madder, or knock me clean cold out. And, to be honest, I'd done my fair share of kicking too, and I'd done some beating up too, and as likely as not I'd come out on top. But this time I had something else eating me in the guts, I knew I did, and it wasn't kicking me sideways and beating me up and making me madder, and it wasn't

knocking me clean cold out either. It was just making me sick inside, and weaker every goddamn day.

Cockroach hotels, you know the ones, "Check In But You Can't Check Out." You just stick to the floor, waving your arms around in the poison air, and your arms, they keep getting slower and slower until you finally just give up and get stuck for the dusty duration. Like I didn't ever want to move off that floor neither. That's the way I felt, like some kind of dying bug, yeah, like a cock-a-roach that checks into one of those *cucaracha* hotels and gets stuck for eternity.

That's what I was trying to tell those doctors at Denver General, and I don't know if they were listening to me or to those little telephone tape recorders they carried around all the time on their belts, but I could be sure of one thing, they trusted their little machinery a whole lot more than they trusted me, so I guess they must have just closed their ears whenever I opened my mouth. Like, for instance, they never heard about no cock-a-roach hotel. And it's true, I had learned a lot up in Provo, but my English was still not so perfect. And I could write better than I could speak because of my accents (both Kickapoo and Spanish too) kept getting in the way and slowing me way down to zero. I mean, pretty often I had to practice about an hour to get a little speech together in the right dialect before I could walk in and see one of those doctors. And sometimes I was drinking too much. That didn't help. But now, at least when I write to you, you can't hear my accents, and my words come out at about the right speed, and if worse comes to worse I can get my English teacher, *Señorini*

Jim Salvator, to help me smooth it all out. But when you're trying to talk to a doctor it's not so easy. I wish I had written all my symptoms down in big bloody letters all over my T-shirt, yeah, like one of those punk rockers. Maybe then the doctors would have listened. You get what I'm saying? I'm not a doctor and I can't begin to talk like one, but if someone really wants to understand me, then all they have to do is listen. I'll answer questions. I'll tell them. I'll repeat things.

The moon come up swollen peach colored. It made me hungry. But the wind had settled down. We'd been hunting all day. It was over a hundred degrees at noon, but frigid in the morning and midnight. We all had aching heads. But my Uncle Peskituma started a fire and we roasted the meat. The coffee was too weak, and the only water we could find was in the pilas for cattle. We'd scrape off the green on top and drink and scoop. It tasted good. Maybe I did tell everyone lies. I lied to myself too. The deer come to us because they want to be people. That's why they want us to kill them, and that's why we kill them with real care. After a deer spirit is killed four times it can be people. But for me, I'm afraid to be killed. What will I become?

Some doctor took a quick look at me and said I had TB. Good guess. A lot of my people have TB. Like about 50%. But no, *doctor*. Not this time. Just because I'm a Kickapoo doesn't mean I have TB. Or maybe you don't know I'm a Kickapoo. Maybe you think I'm just a *migrante campesino*, but that doesn't mean I have TB

either. It's my stomach that hurts. It's my guts, you know, not my chest. *El estómago, sabes*?

You want me to wait? No? What should I do? Come back later. You want me to come back another time? So, I did. I had to, and another *doctor* thought maybe I had the gallstone. But no again. Not this time. Come back later. Maybe I'll have a gallstone by next week and you can fix me right up. I'll be a good boy, hey? Like *Tonto*, hey? And you be *Kimosabi*. I'll come right back next week: *Pronto Tonto*, same time, same station.

Did you ever know what *Tonto* means in Spanish? It means *Stupid*. And so, I was stupid, and I did come back, and I kept coming back, and pretty soon another *doctor* thought it looked like my kidneys were acting like clogged up fuel filters. Might have to get an air compressor and blow those suckers out until they're clean as a whistle! Or maybe we'll have to take us a ride down to the Parts Department and get you a new set of transplants from another Native. Any Mohicans around here? But no, sorry again. It's not the kidneys either. They're filtering fine. But here's a little something for the pain, for the pain, for the pain; and it says don't mix with alcohol, it sure does, but it sure works a whole lot better if you do mix it with alcohol, it sure does, it really does, and here you go, have some of these little white pills too, *Tonto*.

And what do you know? I did come back later. I was getting kind of accustomed to coming back later. You might say I was also getting kind of accustomed to those little white pills mixed with alcohol too. I was getting to be a real regular customer down there at

Denver General, and I bet if someone had made a soap opera of the out-patient clinic, I would have been able to play me a part. "And here it is," said another *doctor* one fine day as the world was turning. "It's various urinary problems." And you take some of these little white pills, *Tonto*. Take them every day, twice a day, and they'll make you feel real good. "Don't worry, *Kimosabi*, I will. And I'll be back later. I will."

I'm glad my god is the wind. That is what my Crying Wind sings. And I am glad too. See the wind moving around in the trees up there. They're throwing me out of this town. But I know where to go; I'll go home to my village. I'm glad my god is the wind, the wind that flies all around this credit-card town. The wind and not the water. The peel of the sky. The low running weaver in the deep green grass, and you never know about my god, sometimes so kind, wants to kiss your hair, singing with the heart of my home town of Naci, and leaving a trail that only I can follow. But sometimes she is so wild she will tear away my whole Kickapoo village like Ranald Mackenzie and his raiding army band, yanking off the roofs, yanking off my horse's head. No promises from the wind, except one promise: to return.

Yeah, they are throwing me out of this credit card town, and trying to keep me away forever. Because it's true that I don't own no property. And it's true that I don't have no platinum-plus-credit-card-of-Amerigo-Vespucci. But you can't own a piece of the wind, like you can't own the wind in Eagle Pass, Texas. And you can't buy the wind in Boulder, Colorado with a credit card neither.

Some people say they own Boulder, and some say they own Eagle Pass too, and they say I am a squatter and I must pick up and leave, but you can't own a piece of the wind.

You say you own this apartment here, Mr. Boulder, Colorado. You say I must keep it clean. But you can't own a piece of my god. You can't own a piece of the wind. You can't dam it up and make a big wind lake. And you can't keep me from my own windy land. You can't throw me away forever and you can't even seal me up with a Certificate of Death because the wind will come and blow it away so even death can't find it.

You know the wind, it's like an old man, ninety-nine-point-nine years old, that's lived quietly, humbly, according to the old ways of the Kickapoo people; fighting when it was time to fight, crying for the dead and destroyed, meeting with his woman down by the river at night, rubbing softly over her skin, drying her; playing with children, going away, dying down, and turning up again on the soft side of a leaf, in the echo of a stump, hiding in the green tule rushes.

The fact is, the *doctores* just didn't know why I was feeling so terrible, and they couldn't find out neither. I mean if you take your car into the garage and the mechanic doesn't know how to diagnose your car's condition, then you're in for a pretty large repair bill because that wily-coyote mechanic will just start replacing parts hit and miss until you've bought you a whole new engine, and maybe a transmission, and maybe a drive train too. Who knows? So, I just quit

those pills, and I quit that alcohol. I just threw it all away. Then one night I was rolling through the pain in a kind of half nod, half sleep, and I had a funny dream. There was a big greasy trouble light attached to a yellow extension cord and that wily-coyote auto mechanic was gawking down my throat.

"You're a Chevy Apache, ain't you?"

"No, I'm Kickapoo."

"Don't really matter. Goddamnit, are you a Chevy or a Ford?"

"I'm neither, I'm a person. I'm a Kickapoo. Me-thu-de-ne-nia. That means the 'People' in our language. And mister, my stomach hurts real bad."

"Naw, it ain't your stomach, Red Buddy. You're just a sorry carburetor, that's what you are. You need a new set of lungs. All you damn Chevy Apaches are the same. You pick up TB like it was a welfare check. But here you go, Tonto, take you some of this Motor Honey. It'll take away all your trials and tribulations. Make you regular again. Shrink your gaskets."

Like I say, nobody had to help me quit those pain pills. You like Motor Honey? I just flushed it all down the toilet. And nobody had to help me quit alcohol either. I never went to AA or to alcohol recovery or even to a halfway house for restless Native Americans. I knew what to do all by myself. I just stopped cold. *Nicha-i*. Good-bye.

And I knew those *doctores* too. I knew they'd give me pain pills again if I just came in and looked at them. I

didn't even have to say, "Hello, my name is Mister So & So." They already knew my name, better than me, and they spelled it J-U-N-K-I-E. And I still know plenty of so-called Indians who can get pain pills any time they want. Maybe those *doctores* figure we got more pain than most. Maybe they just want to put us to sleep, like, "Here you go, *Tonto*, it's the happy hunting ground!" Who knows? Maybe I'm afraid to know.

Anyway, after like thirty trips to Denver General I could see they were getting nowhere, and I didn't want them spinning their wheels on my back, so I just stopped checking in*. Adiós*. *Nicha-i.* Good-bye.

And I almost escaped that cockroach hotel. But on March 22, 1981, someone must have booked me a reservation and paid in advance, and I guess I was ready to check in. Yeah, I was living up in Boulder. I'd been drafted into the University of Colorado through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Migrant Action Program (MAP). I didn't qualify as a *Native American*. I don't think anybody ever thought I was *Kickapoo*. They just figured I was another migrant, and really it wouldn't have mattered if anyone had known I was a full, pure blood Kickapoo. It wouldn't have mattered if anyone had known that my ancestors once hunted and farmed over ninety-nine-point-nine million acres of virgin land in what is now choking under the so-called boundaries of Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. It wouldn't have mattered if anyone had known how our land was stolen from us; that we were swindled blind, that we were made promises that were broken and given treaties that were

worthless in 1803, 1809, 1816, and 1819; and then again in 1832, 1871 and 1883. And the biggest swindle of all could have been the one in 1891, ushering in the so-called *Boomers* of the famous Oklahoma Land Rush. That's when the U.S. government sold our land for about one dollar an acre to speculators and homesteaders (them *Boomers*) when we weren't even there to protect ourselves.

But, to be fair, when it comes to us *Native Americans*, comparing swindles can be hard work. You need a supercomputer with some honest algorithms, and you just can't find one. Think about it for just one second: 1891 is just one hundred years before Mister Jim Salvator, the white guy who helped me write this book, got out of law school in Colorado. He graduated law school in 1991. I wonder if one hundred years earlier he would have tried to stop that Kickapoo land swindle; or would he have greased its wheels, as every other lawyer did around that time, letting off their terrible stink?

So, that was just a little of what the American government did to the People. They cheated us, they lied to us, and with the help of Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, back in 1873, the U.S. Calvary just about murdered all our women, children and elders by raiding our home in *Nacimiento* when all the warriors were away hunting. Very brave, those Mackenzie cavalry men, when it came to killing helpless children. Very stout, those brave U. S. rangers, when it came to raping our women and bludgeoning our old people to death.

Yes, us Indians, the destroyed people, but I can tell you, we are not destroyed. Because some day real soon, if I have anything to say about it, you're going to see on the silver screen the whole story about Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie and his illegal cavalry raid on the Kickapoo village in Mexico. Everybody should know. Then old General Custer, he won't be so lonely any more as the *número-uno* big-son-of-a-bitch. But there's one big difference between Custer and Mackenzie. Because Mackenzie got away with his murdering, Scot-free. He probably received a goddamn award for kidnapping our children. I don't know. I'm going to investigate that. But I can tell you one thing, he died a broken man, forgotten by his family and friends *because* he raided the Kickapoos of *Nacimiento*. And so, we took our own revenge. But in slow-motion, in our Kickapoo time, turning his brain to cold mush and feeding him his just desserts.

It's time now, time to shake the air. I've got to lift my old heavy heart. I've got to fly. See me down here, smoking. I'm curing my illness. I'm lifting the bulge of my belly. I got to pursue. You always got to pursue.

Yes, and listen to me sing, Mister This-Land-Is-Your-Land, Mister Woody Guthrie. I'm bound for glory too, even if your father did sell off my sacred land in Old Oklahoma. That-Land-Was-My-Land.

So, now I see where I stand, right in the ear of the wind, just waiting for something to happen. And while I'm waiting, I'll sing too. It's about time to sing about the wind.

It's time now, time to shake the air, time for the leaves to rustle, time to see the hair go wild, time to go far away from here and never return, until it's time to be blowing back into this credit card town.

Oh yeah, just like my Crying Wind sings. You might read her book and you'd think you've heard it all before. Not really, because you're going to hear it from me, Ekoneskaka, in my own words, and I won't need an editor or a translator or a smooth-it-all-out-person like Señorini Jim Salvator, who is just another fraud and liar when it comes to telling stories about us so-called Indians in his little book called "Kickapoo Juice."

Why tell stories about us, Señorini? Why hide behind me? Why don't you tell your own story?

Do you really think you can abscond from your very own whiteness?

You are Mister Custer and Señorini Columbo all rolled up into one. You are a melted pot. But I am a copper kettle. My Kickapoo stories are like religious secrets. I could never tell you anything about us, even if I wanted to.

So yeah, oh yeah, Señorini, like pretty soon, real soon, I'm going to take my own Kickapoo words and go on the screenwriter's path, directly to Hollywood's stars, maybe even with Mister Willie Nelson singing right by my side. And maybe by then all the white folks will feel kind of guilty in the key of G major when they see my feature film on the silver screen and hear old Willie singing about us "poor Indians." And if they feel the guilty nature of this nation, the U-S-of-A, then maybe they might just persevere along with us, the Kickapoo, Me-thu-de-ne-nia,

the People, because by then the white folks will be going to do something spiritual and beautiful about the Original-Stinking-Sin of American Conquest. Yeah, like reparations even, big time, because by then they will be listening to a Real Victim's Impact Statement. All about the Crimes and the Cover-up called Western Expansion.

Or else.

Or else what?

The whites might just boil away in their own Conquistador Juices.

Just kidding?

No, not really.

Boil it up, Señorini, hot and fast!

But back in 1981, just when the cancer got me, all that seemed to matter was that the government of the United States of America did not even recognize us Kickapoos from Old Mexico as United States citizens. No kidding. We weren't citizens of any country, not Mexico neither, even though we'd been in and out of that country for hundreds of years. We had, and still have, a village there. We had, and still have, our sacred ceremonial grounds there too. I was born there, but I wasn't a Mexican citizen, and neither were any of the *Me-thu-de-ne-nia.*

Well, like I tried to show you, one hundred years isn't really a very long time at all. Hell, we'd been up in North America as long as the trees and sun and rain had been there, and who knows, maybe even longer. Maybe we'd been there forever, like the Blue Mountains of *Nacimiento*. Who knows?

So, *Señorini*, you say times change. No, not really. People change. Time stays the same.

My pony and me were about frozen, and each time one of his hooves struck a stone it was like icy lightning that would crack and shatter before another hoof could rap itself down on the smooth cold stomach of the earth. And my uncle Peskituma's band of dogs looked so pitiful, like a trap of frozen jackrabbits. I mean they looked like they'd just been frightened by a blue coyote with seven heads and lost all their mangy hair. I was ashamed to be with them, and I was sure they were the only bald-headed dogs in all of Coahuila. But then I figured I must have looked just about the same as them.

I galloped up to the wikiup, screaming my own head off, probably pulling out my own black hair, unable to talk any sense at all. But I was trying to tell them, I was trying to say, "Hey, listen to me! My Little Granpa is sick!" But I couldn't make my words. I could only watch those dogs. And there was one thing about those dogs, they kept on going. I have to say that for them. They'd run a thousand miles on three legs and hop five hundred more on two legs and then just drag themselves all the way until they got to where they needed to be. I mean, I could learn something from those dogs. I wasn't going to give up neither.

But in 1981, old Ugly Sam, he wasn't going to give the People citizenship. He wasn't going to risk one copper quarter of the timber and oil and ore he'd torn from our land to help us. The People were stranded, living beneath a bridge on the *Río Grand*, as squatters.

They had no place to go in all the United States except this little cracker-sized chunk of land sitting vacant beneath the International Bridge that separated Eagle Pass from Mexico. I think the City of Eagle Pass claimed it was a city "park" but it was just a vacant lot with no grass or trees. It sat right between a golf course and a liquor store, and we sure didn't own it. We were a camp of refugees from the so-called "Indian Wars." And the news media, they finally came down and picked us out a name for our camp. They called it "Little Heart." Real nice, catchy. I seen a picture of my own Aunt *Kika* down there in Little Heart. A real nice color picture of my very own Aunt *Kika* right in the middle of *Newsweek* magazine, a "poor old Indian woman." And *Newsweek*, of course, they called us "The Tribe Without a Country," which was true enough, but we didn't call our camp "Little Heart." We called it *El Aguila*, The Eagle. Like we'd just say, "We're going to *El Aguila*," The Eagle, the squatters' camp down on the fake border in the abandoned town park of Eagle Pass, Texas.

And Jesus Christ, we even got charitable contributions of cast-off-white-man clothes, so many *ropas*, just dumped on the street in front of our make-shift *wikiups.* We could pick and choose. I once picked me a nice yellow dress shirt from a giant pile of these *ropas*, but soon I had to use it as a grease rag, just a few hours later when I was fixing my truck (yes, my fast red Chevy Cheyenne) after we had made the hard ride overland to *Naci*, driving right through the rising river by *Ejidos Morelos*. It didn't matter, though, I mean about the dress shirt, because there were so many nice

new *ropas* for us poor Indians, just dumped right there on the street beside our squatting *wikiup*s.

Clothes! *Ropas!* Free! *Gratis!* In huge piles, dumped from dump trucks. Where did all these *ropas* come from? Who Knows?

But it was real nice. So nice. All those fancy clothes. I mean real nice fancy clothes, like brand-new. Yeah. (Better keep them savages covered-up good. Like as not, they run around naked.)

And so, there's your eagle, Great America, the symbol of your country. That's what we Kickapoos were, and still are. The Eagle. *El Aguila.* But back then in those 1980's, you know, we were like the bumper sticker, "American Indian, Caution. Endangered Species." That was us, just like the American eagles. Endangered. That was us Kickapoos alright.

And speaking of bumper stickers, one time back then I sent me a letter to the "You Asked for It" television show. I mean, I asked for it, I guess. I wanted them to go down to *El Aguila* and take a real good look around. The People were there. The *Me-thu-de-ne-nia*. I wanted to show the "You Asked for It" people our squatter's village so they could show it on their prime-time TV.

Well, they didn't go, of course. Too touchy for them I guess, I mean like prime-time in the 1980's, or maybe prime-time anytime. It would be just too touchy for them. You know, the truth can be just *too, too* touchy. But they sent me a bumper sticker. Yes, they did. It said, "I'm a Kickapoo Indian and Proud of It." Yeah. Really. They sent me two of them bumper stickers. Both cars I

put them on collapsed. One smoked like Mackenzie's campfire. The other got the wheels ripped off right away. Yeah. All four. The thieves jacked up the car and took all four chrome mag wheels and wide tread tires, and then they just left it sitting up on jacks. Then the next night they came back and grabbed the jacks. Our beautiful car (it was really Mary Sue's pretty blue Malibu convertible) was just left there on the pavement of the parking lot.

Yeah, man. Nowhere to go.

That's a little joke, I guess, true though it may be, but what I tell you now is no joke. Because I tell you about the U.S. Government. It taught me one thing. It taught me how to fail.

So, to be like Crystal-Gayle-clear, ringing out true and free, according to the United States Government, I wasn't a gen-u-ine Native American. And, according to the Mexican Government, I wasn't a gen-u-ine Mexican. And, according to most anybody's government, I wasn't any kind of American-Americano-Vespucci, whatever that may be, I guess the University of Colorado Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) must have concluded I was an "undocumented" migrant. And one thing was true. I had been migrating all over the continent for my entire life. I had no special papers. My people had always migrated. You heard about the boat people. Well, I guess by then I was one of the pickup truck people. I mean, I knew I was a Kickapoo, but I swear no one else did. So, I entered the Migrant Action Program (MAP) at the UC-Boulder. And since I was now a university student, and since I already had a family, I

found myself at the University of Colorado family housing area called Smiley Court.

Smiley. I was living in rooms in a building just a mile from where young scientists were making germs for the next big conquest. I grilled some good steaks over there.

My Uncle Peskituma jumped down from his horse, light on his feet, as if the air was holding him steady, and then without a word both he and my Uncle Widaya ran for the wikiup and disappeared inside, leaving me alone with nothing to do except look after the horses. I knew I had to do it. I knew it was important for me to get them safely into the corral before the wind came up again and spooked them. I grabbed the reins to Peskituma's horse. Widaya's mare was getting spooked already, but I got her settled down, and then I let my pony, Enisimo, lead them all the way through the rickety huizache gate. The horses went in pretty easy. They were glad to be resting. They sort of nuzzled up to each other, and then they trotted over to the protected side of the corral where I'd built them a lean-to earlier that year. I walked over and got them some fresh water, and then I wiped down their backs and legs as best as I could. Enisimo's neck was like a coiled band of muscle rippling as he drank, and the short hair on his withers felt slick and wavy in the spaces between my fingers. I could tell that no matter what happened to me now I could always count on Enisimo to be my friend, and while I was thinking how lucky I was to have a pony like Enisimo, I was also watching Peskituma's goddamn dogs mix into the darkness on the other side of

the wikiup, and once they got there they were just so quiet they seemed to disappear like smoke rings.

I was staying home all the time. There wasn't anywhere to go. I kept the curtains closed. All I could do anymore was drink coffee and watch TV, and so that's what I did. I surely couldn't study *The History of the Chicano in the Southwest*, interesting as that may have been. I mean, what's a Chicano? Am I a Chicano? What's a *Chicapoo*?

So that big day, that Sunday, March 22, 1981, I was lying down on the sofa, watching *Little House on the Prairie*. I remember the story. It was about an Indian boy who lost his parents and relatives and tribe, and he found himself adopted by a nice old maid, a white lady who was still living with her father. Well, the old maid's father happened to be some kind of retired cavalry man who just about hated every drop of Indian blood there was to hate, and that still wasn't enough for him. He was going to straighten out that little-redskin-savage if it killed him. I can't recall if it killed him or not, but it nearly killed me, that's for sure.

That kid was having a real hard go of it at school too, just like I always did, especially with the other boys, (who were not Indian boys) and they were always wanting to beat on the "Redskin" because he could outride them on their own damn horses.

Yeah, I really liked that show because it reminded me so much of my own childhood. But since it was *Little House on the Prairie*, and since it was a kid's

show on prime-time TV, it *had* to have a sort of happy-ever-after ending, just as you would expect.

I swear I didn't mind though. I was sick enough. Happy-ever-after was okay by me. I needed a little escape because I knew the real story all too well. I knew the real thing by heart, you might say, because I'd lived it.

I mean if *Little House on the Prairie* decided to give their story a happy-ever-after-ending to make people feel better, then even if it was fake, it was still okay by me because for a second it really did make me feel better. But, funny thing is, I just can't remember how that ending goes.

Well, sure, this TV show came to its fairytale ending, whatever it was, and I could feel some tears building up behind my eyes like drops from a leaky heater core. I needed that happy ending, no kidding. I really did. But then the commercials came on. Sure enough, there was one for a Barbie Doll, and then I think there was that sexy one for Diet Pepsi. And those few commercials, I guess they just about did me in. Because I blacked out when Barbie was sipping her last drop of one-calorie pop through a long plastic straw. I must have rolled to the floor, stuck solid, you might say, in the heart of the cockroach hotel. I got my reservation all right. There was blood too, a lot of blood in my vomiting.

As the horses finished their drinking I was stroking Enisimo's side, but then I just let him be. I walked over to the edge of my Little Granpa's wikiup and I leaned against one of the smooth wooden poles that was planted

in the dirt. Then it really began. Waiting. I was waiting for Widaya or Peskituma to come on back outside. I was waiting for my Little Grandpa Nimakana, just like Crying Wind was waiting for her old Grandma. I knew Nimakana was inside there, giving out his last breath and final words. But waiting is a funny thing, and for a boy it is not anything you ever learn easy. But then somehow I knew there was nothing else I could ever even think about, and there was nothing else I could ever even do to stop me from thinking. Every moment all of my mind and all of my senses were aimed toward the door of the wikiup, and if I'd thought just a little bit harder I bet you that door would have sprung open all by itself and I would've walked clear through the back wall all the way to the store in Ejidos Morelos, just to buy me and my Little Granpa some Cokes.

Since then there have been a lot of times in my life when I found myself waiting, like waiting for something to happen. So many times, days, weeks, months, even years. Like waiting in a government line, or waiting for a doctor's report, or waiting to find out if I had cancer, or waiting to see if I would get better and keep on living or just sink down and die. It's a different kind of waiting. It's not like a hunter in a high hidden place, waiting for an animal to cross. It's not like an ambush either, when you're waiting for someone you want to hurt or even kill. And it's sure not like waiting for your girl, the one you love, to walk down and meet you by the river at night. I don't know how to really describe it, but that night, standing there by the *wikiup*,

that was probably my first real lesson in learning how to wait, and even if I wanted to, I don't know how to repeat it.

You see, there's a trick to that kind of waiting. You have to learn to do it for no reason at all. Or for the same reason that your heart beats or your lungs go up and down or your eyes blink when a stone comes flying at your face. It's like you have to become a horse with your back to the breeze, waiting for the night and the full moon to rise. But I was just a young boy, so I just stood there, alone, stuck in the cold dark, maybe also trying to listen for the wind, but there wasn't any breeze around neither. The wind had rolled itself up and just left me.

Way down the stream I could just see a lantern swinging by my Aunt Kika's house, and I thought about taking a walk down there, but instead I planted my feet in the earth like a couple of huizache roots and my ears kept listening for anything. Some thunder took a roll up through the hills and it sounded like huge chunks of stone breaking loose from the mountains and rolling down a valley somewhere and tearing up everything in the way. Those were the big ones. The little thunders were more like the broken mufflers I'd heard in Ejidos Morelos when the Mexicanos and Negritos wanted to go racing around in their stripped-down jalopies. I thought maybe if I stayed real quiet now I could hear the secret of the wind.

I remember, I'd be holding my breath, stretching my ears to hear every sound. I must have looked like a jackrabbit hiding behind a rock, with just my ears

pointing over the top, and it's a good thing there were no coyotes around there, because if one had come ambling by, quiet like they sometimes do, so quiet they get away with your chicken and your eggs before you even know they were there, like if one had come by like that it could have snuck right up behind me and nipped me in the ass. But I think I was even too quiet for a coyote to get by me. Because between the rolls of thunder I could hear the tiny grains of dust falling from my pant legs and hitting on the packed dirt around the wikiup's porch. And somehow the notion of ever moving again seemed impossible then. I'd finally changed to frozen stone. I'd felt it sneaking up on me all day, and especially since crossing the river that morning. I froze up solid at last, like a blood popsicle. But then I felt the other way too, like I was clutched in a pair of claws, and those claws belonged to orange glowing eyes, and even the movement of flames seemed impossible then. How could I set a fire burning and watch those flames dancing all over? How could I watch our shadows grow huge and wild on the wikiup walls? How could I move at all when everything only wanted stillness and darkness like a lid on a bucket of water?

So, the thunder picked up again, and a leaf slid across my feet like it had a hundred little teeny-weeny legs. I was still waiting to see if my Grandpa Nimakana would ask me to come by his bedside to hear his last words. I knew I had to wait. That is what Crying Wind did in her story. But I didn't hear any words from anyone, not a voice, not even the sound of a mouth cracking open, trying to suck in the windless air. It was like Crying Wind and me had actually become the same person with the

same story except her story went one way and mine went the other.

Then the door sprung open like an eyelid. My Uncle Widaya flew outside. His legs were like a pair of broken fence posts, but he flew right toward me with a speed like a diving bird. He had a kind of look on his face like I'd never seen before, except on a deer when it first recognizes it's shot. It's a strange look, because the bullet has just entered its chest and the blood is just seconds from bursting out the wound. Just then the deer seems to know that whether it never takes another step, or whether it runs another ten miles before bleeding to death, that there is but one end for it. So, I've seen it, and I can only say that its face gives up being surprised. It gets real dark and sad, and it has a sort of graceful look too. It almost seems like that deer loves you then, that it loves all things, and most especially the life it is giving away to you. And this look on the deer's face, it only lasts a bare second before anguish and anger and fury set back in. Then the animal either slumps down quick and starts to die, or bolts off crazy through the hills and you've got a chase on your hands. It all depends on whether your bullet has pierced its heart and killed it quick, or whether your shot has lodged in a lung, like a slug on fire that will take a while to burn out yet.

That was the way *Widaya* looked at me, but back then, as a boy, I didn't truly understand what he meant. In one way he meant my Little Grandpa was calling me inside. He meant I should come in there right away and listen real close. But then in some other way he meant

that *Nimakana* had stopped short of telling me anything, that there were no last words for me, that it was just like my Crying Wind's story, that what I had feared most had come to pass. I knew then that my days of living with my Little Granpa were over, and that from then on, I'd be settling down with my uncles, who would raise me up to be somebody, I guess. But still I kept waiting for those words from my Little Granpa. I thought they might come in the wind.

But it was only later, maybe a hundred years up the road, when I rolled to the floor in my blood and cancer and vomit, and my wife bent over my face and my two daughters held my cold shaking hands.

(And my true pool-shark friend, *Chago Maestes*, he came burning up the road in his beat-up Chevy, rushing me to the Boulder Community ER.)

Yes, it was only then that I thought I heard the wind, my god, rising too.

It was pulling blankets of dust off the Blue Mountains of *Naci*, driving all the *Me-thu-de-ne-nia* back inside their *wikiup*s. And the giant wind carried some voice that I was ready to hold tender like I used to hold the head of *Nimakana*, my Little Granpa, stroking his hair real softly as he would sing.

Granpa, Let's Trade Our Teeth!

One time me and my wife Mary Sue and my daughter Eurika were driving up by the "Garden of Canada," right by the border, right by where Montana and North Dakota touch Saskatchewan: Three Corners.

You remember the picture we got of Mary Sue standing by the sign that says, "Welcome to North Dakota." She looks real good in that picture, real happy. The wind's blowing soft. The sun's shining bright. It's a chief's day, and it was a special place where we were just then because you could stand in one place and really be standing in three places at the same time. There was nothing between those three corners. We could cross over to anywhere we wanted to go: "I'm going over to say hello to the Montana people," I'd say, and away I'd be going.

We even went up to Regina for the Canada Independence Day. There were Border Patrol cars all over the place, but they never bothered us because there were a lot of people like us around there back then, working the crops. We didn't know much English language, like maybe three words; hamburger, fries and Coke. But we just went to take a look around, and we did go looking around, and we ate hamburgers and we had fries and Cokes.

When the Border Patrol had a "stop and search" at the border they right away just recognized us as Kickapoo Juice and let us go on across.

That summer we'd been driving all over. We topped onions in Colorado, planted beets in Utah,

thinned ourselves in North Dakota, and ate apples in Wisconsin. That sounds a like a country western song, don't it, *hombre*? Go get it! Sing it, *hombre*! And let's rake in the silver *plata.* Yeah, let's rake in them pure gold *pesos*!

Yeah, sure, that summer the car was our home, and we were living in that car, and that's how it was,and that's how it still is, for us Kickapoos from *Tejas*, us *Chicapoos* from Old Mexico.

So that one summer day while we were driving up there, going around Three Corners; and Eurika, my daughter, she was playing with her loose tooth. She kept tugging on it and pretty soon it dropped right out into her hand. "Daddy," she says, "Mommy, I lost a tooth!" And right away as soon as we heard that I pulled off the road and Eurika jumped out of the car and she started running around the car four times, starting in the east and running around to the south and running around to the west and running around to the north and running back around to the east, four times, running and running around that car, and then she just stopped and faced to the east and threw her tooth just as far as she could, and she was shouting: "Granpa, Granma *Sa-sa-ke*; let's trade our teeth!"

Sa-sa-ke, that means snake, like a sacred old snake. Usually, in the true Kickapoo way, she would have run around the *wikiup*, or the horse or the burro, or if there was a fire she would have run around that; or if there were none of those we would have started a fire and she would have run around that. But that summer, it was our car that she was running around four times

because by then things were really starting to look different for us Kickapoo from Old *Tejas*, real different. Either way, though, you still face to the east, and you still shout the same thing.

I wonder if anyone was out there watching us? I wonder what they were thinking? Probably like: "Hey, look at those crazy people over there."

Yeah, real crazy, *hombre*, Kickapoo Juice.

Indian

Indian, that's not really who I am. That's some name the white people gave me. It was a mistake, like some kind of joke. I'm not an Indian.

Native American, now what's that? The name America came from some egotistical mapmaker in Italy who was lost all the time anyway. I'm not a native to him and his problems.

Kickapoo, that's not really who I am either. There's a Kickapoo Park in Illinois, and there's a *Kikapu Carne Seca* in Mexico. But Kickapoo is just a word the settlers came up with because they didn't have the inclination to fit their mouths around *Ki-ki-ka-pa-wa.*

Like Crying Wind says in her little book that I read and read and read again, and even like to copy out carefully in my own fine handwriting and pretend that it is mine, *Ki-ki-ka-pa-wa* tells you more about me and my people. It means "to walk about," like to walk from here over to there, and then maybe to walk back, or then maybe to keep going. But it means you go out, maybe hunting, maybe just wandering free and easy, but always moving on your own two feet; and maybe you're looking for something, or maybe you're waiting for something to happen, or maybe you're travelling from camp to camp, covering a thousand miles of plains and desert and woods and mountains. Yeah, you keep on moving, you're Kickapoo.

That's *ki-ki-ka-pa-wa, hombre.*

Now today you could say that me and my people don't walk about anymore. You could say that we only

cruise around in four-wheel drive pick-ups (that's our favorite) or sometimes the youngsters like Trans Am and Camaro rally packs. You could go ahead and say that, and you could say that now we just drive all over the country, crossing the borders wherever we have to go, talking on our CB radios, stopping wherever we want to stop; and then you could call us "*Chicapoos*" (that's Chicano and Kickapoo mixed together) and I would have to laugh and say maybe you're right.

I would have to laugh because I wouldn't want to think too hard about what's really happened. I wouldn't want to tell you how really right, but also how really wrong you could be.

But now (no matter what you call us) you do have a better idea about where the word "Kickapoo" comes from. It's not just a mythical word. It's not just a name for a child's pet donkey in a book on the shelf of your new town library. And Kickapoo Juice is not some sticky sweet stuff that you drink to get drunk with Li'l Abner. But you don't ever know what it is, just like you don't ever see the war drum. We don't call ourselves Kickapoo. We don't even call ourselves *Ki-ki-ka-pa-wa.* The word we use is *Me-thu-de-ne-nia*, the People.

Y Qué Viva Jesús

So, one day I was walking about in the city. I was at a conference in Denver. The Migrant Council had sent me there from Utah because I was one of their Coordinators. One day we finished our meeting early. It was about two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and I was just taking a break, walking down a street in the city. I think it was East Colfax Street because I was walking by the hotel where we were staying. So, anyway, I walked up to the signal light on the corner and there were these two guys just standing there leaning against the signal post. Right away one of the guys turns to me.

"Hey," he says, "hey, you believe in God?"

"Yes," I say, "yes, I believe in God."

"Hey," he says, "hey, you believe in Jesus?"

"Yes," I say, "yes, I believe in Jesus."

"Hey," he says, "hey, you think he's coming back?"

"Yes," I say, "yes, I think maybe he's already come back, and he's living now right here in this city."

The guy just looked at me for a few seconds.

Then he says, "Hey, you got a cigarette?"

"Yes," I say, "yes, I got a cigarette," and I shake out a cigarette and give one to him, and then I shake out another one for his friend. They go ahead and take my cigarettes. No problem.

That was about a hundred years ago. I think they were hippies because the guy who did the talking had a beard. He also kind of looked like a hippie. The other guy didn't have a beard, but he also kind of looked like a hippie. They both were just standing there by the signal

light, watching the traffic move by like a rising river or a good show on TV.

The light changed, and I crossed the street. Those guys just stood there smoking, watching me walk down the other side of East Colfax. There were a lot of hippies back then. It was kind of fun. Sometimes they called themselves White Indians. And they grew their hair long too, and so they looked like White Indians might look on a full moon at dusk, way down by the River *Sabina*.

The Heart of *Nacimiento*

Hey, *hombre*, come over and take a look at this. Put your hands on it. See this big egg-shaped rock? This is the heart of *Nacimiento*. This is where the energy of everything comes from. It goes from here to over there and then back again. Forever, *hombre*, like Kickapoo Juice, and beautiful too.

The heart energy goes all around these places we call *Nacimiento*. This is the living place. It's the heart of the village. See how the stone moves around inside the rock? All those grains of rock are moving like a pure river at dawn. And you can drink it, *hombre*. You can. Most people won't be seeing and tasting that. But you will, *hombre*. Don't worry. You're not sick. You're not melting. You're lucky, *hombre*, real lucky. Most people just see a rough surface of granite like some kind of boundary marker or something. They see it, and then they pass by.

That's probably how they see us Kickapoos too. They just see some Indians somewhere maybe. Oh, Indians. Just Indians. There are no real Indians left no more. They see us with their hard looks and their pitiful looks and their hate looks and their guilt looks and their shame looks, and finally they decide we aren't no real Indians anyways because there are no real Indians left no more, especially in Texas, because Mrs. John Wayne gave birth to too many thirty-thirty shells.

And so most people, they pass us by, just as they might pass by this egg-shaped rock, like it was just another big stone of no value, standing in the way. And I

guess we're lucky about that too because most people don't come here to *Nacimiento*. They leave us alone. They don't put their hands on this rock and feel its beauty for what it is, the heart of this place, the heart of this land and village we call *Nacimiento*. They can't see and feel this big old rock breathing and taking everything in and breathing and letting everything out, even the littlest thing, even the biggest thing, but this is the heart of *Nacimiento*, and this is what our hearts must do.

Pes-Ki-Tu-Ma

Early one morning My Uncle *Peskituma* was driving from our village to *Ejidos Morelos*. That's a poor little Mexican co-op made of dusty dirt, located near my beautiful village of *Nacimiento*. And *Mexicanos*, of course, live on the co-op in *Morelos*. But some *Negritos* live there too. They came to Mexico as escaped slaves (running with the Seminoles and riding with the Kickapoos) all the way to *Coahuila* around 1850.

So, *Peskituma* was driving along real fast in his pickup, as he usually did, fast as a blue feathered road-runner kicking up clouds of dirt, bound for some fat cattle trade (or maybe some pretty *señorita*) over there in *Ejidos Morelos*. And pretty soon some real live road-runners came speeding up beside him.

Yes, a lot of bright blue *pájaro* road-runners were chasing him through the dusty dirt like dogs might chase your car on the street. There were about six of these *pájaros*, so happy to be chasing *Peskituma*, but, sorry to say, *Peskituma* had to test his aim (like to make sure his thirty-thirty rifle was correctly sighted, just perfect) so BLAM!

His ears were ringing like copper pans. And one of those blue magic *pájaros* vaporized into the *Mexicano* air. The other five soon veered off, using their native intelligence to the *maxímo*. But, you know, they were like royal blue and glistening green. So, hopefully, the other five won't never chase *Peskituma* again. Because he is a skillful shooter, driving along with one hand and never slowing down as he takes his perfect aim.

But then finally *Peskituma* did set his rifle down beside him on the truck seat and took a nice sip of hot *café.* "Good *café*!" he says to nobody.

The sun was still hiding its face. *Peskituma* started singing along with his radio, drinking coffee as he drove. But the road was sometimes rough and bumpy in the early summer, as it always is after the spring washouts. So *Peskituma* was soon feeling the urge of nature and he stopped his truck on a lonely stretch and got out to relieve himself. He was taking his time, so he turned off the engine, but the radio was still wired direct to the battery, so it kept playing tunes from the *Muzquiz* radio station even while the truck was shut off. (*Muzquiz* (*Ciudad Melchor Múzquiz*) is the big *Mexicano* town about 20 miles from our Kickapoo village in *Nacimiento*.)

So, *Peskituma* was just standing there relieving himself and he thought he heard someone else singing too. Yes, he heard a high squeaky voice singing along with *Radio Muzquiz*. Really, he couldn't believe his ears.

The sun peeped out from behind a cloud shaped like a Blue Mountain. Then *Peskituma* saw a shadow crossing the road, and then he saw who made the shadow. It was *Ma-weh-ah*. That means coyote. At first my Uncle *Peskituma* wouldn't believe that a *Mawehah* was singing like a person. He thought somebody was hiding around there, trying to play tricks on him, but he didn't know who would be so crazy as to hide out there in the middle of nowhere, just to play a trick on him. He really didn't think it could be worth anyone's trouble, and he was right, because as he watched closer he could

see *Mawehah's* mouth moving up and down along with the words of the song. Hey, what do you call that? Lip-sync? Something like that. But this *Mawehah* was really singing.

Now, as we all probably know, it's just like a *Mawehah* to try to be something more than she really is, and today this *Mawehah* was trying to be a singer on *Radio Muzquiz*, but actually, according to my uncle, that she sounded terrible. Her voice was too sharp and squeaky, like she had eaten a dozen *ratones* for breakfast.

Just the same, my Uncle *Peskituma* decided to follow *Mawehah* around. *Peskituma* wanted to find out if this *Mawehah* had some kind of special powers, so he tracked her around in a circle for about an hour, and all the time she kept singing those *Norteño* ballads, just like on *Radio Muzquiz*.

Sometimes *Mawehah* would lose track of the words and hum along, but most the time she was singing like a real *mariachi*.

The sun was way up by now, sizzling away the last of the clouds shaped like Blue Mountains, but *Mawehah* had gone down into a dried-out *barranca* where the light was still half shadows. There was a powerful echo down there too, and later my Uncle *Peskituma* would claim that *Mawehah* had gone down there to sing in an echo chamber because she had gotten used to echo chamber sound effects from listening to all the advertisements on *Radio Muzquiz*.
Who knows? Maybe she thought the bubbling echoes caused by the *barranca* were a most

beautiful addition to her voice, wobbling like buzzards into the blue air of *Coahuila*.

"No doubt about it," claimed *Peskituma*, "this *Mawehah* had special, unique powers."

And pretty soon my uncle discovered where this *Mawehah* was living. She was living down in the brush inside the *barranca*. But *Mawehah* seemed to know she was being followed because she would not go all the way into her den. She would just poke her head in, maybe check her pups, then circle around some more, then poke her head in again. She gave up singing all together because she knew *Peskituma* was close on her trail.

With great caution and delight, My Uncle *Peskituma* waited. He waited like a smooth stone waits at the bottom of a crystal river. Then the *Mawehah* finally approached her den and poked her head way down in there, maybe checking on her pups again, maybe counting her supply of rotten *ratones*, just to make sure there was still plenty left for her pups to munch away on all day.

So, as she was busy with her checking and counting, my uncle snuck right up behind her, so quiet. And just as *Mawehah* was backing out of her den, she bumped right into my uncle. She didn't move then. Except her head, which turned ever so slowly around until it looked up to see my uncle looking down at her. At this point (my uncle claims) *Mawehah* got so scared she made a fire on the spot. That means take

a shit. We say, “make a fire” when we mean “take a shit.”

We also say that when *Mawehah* is singing that means someone is going to die. I ought to know. I almost died. A lot of singing by *Mawehah* was filling my ear drums. I don’t care how good it sounds, or even how evil and rotten and awful it sounds. It can sound like *Norteños* or like a Country Western being sung by a star, or it can even be coughed out by a toothless old white man. Never mind. It’s bad luck.

So, when my uncle tells this story he always likes to end by saying, “Well, I guess that *Mawehah* won’t be singing anymore.” But then, as often as not, we start to hear some squeaky yapping coming from an echo chamber out by the *barranca*, and my uncle balances his coffee on his knee and steps on the gas and we keep that pickup rolling.

Sabina

The *Río Sabina* runs through our village in *Nacimiento*. The springs that feed the river are a short walk from my home. The water is clear. It's not full of shopping carts and exhaust pipes and all kinds of garbage and junk and radioactivity like some of the rivers up in Colorado. You can see the fish swimming in the *Río Sabina*, and when you go in for yourself to take a bath or a swim, the minnows come right up and huddle in a school around your wavy legs. And if you put your head in the water and hold it very still, the little fish come right up to your nose. They just like to touch and tickle you, or maybe they think you're very interesting.

On a hot day there's really nothing better than to go down to the river for a bath and a swim. It's like entering paradise. You leave behind all the dirt and sweat and blistering merciless sun. The water is fresh and cool, but those words don't say enough. Those are the right words, but you've probably heard them too many times to know what they really mean, and you'll never feel what they really mean until you swim in a place like the River *Sabina*. I don't want to pretend to you, but you'll think I'm pretending when I tell you it's like magic to swim there. It will make all your sickness go away.

The rocks on the bottom are polished. For hundreds of thousands of years the water has been pouring over them, making them so smooth that your feet seem to fit wherever you put them, and these rocks are also hard and clean and kind of warm against your

feet and body. That's a little part of the magic, and it's only the little parts I can openly discuss. I've been walking all over that river, crossing the stone dams that we build with our hands just by piling up smooth round rocks. I listen to the fish jump because there is good fishing everywhere. I can reach down and grab a fish with my bare hands. I could spend all day down by the river, swimming and fishing and playing, and some days I do.

But at night there are special times when you can hear sobbing way down by the River *Sabina*. I myself have heard it often, and I have felt strange things there that made me want to run away and hide. The best time to listen, if you are feeling like an adventure and you really want to hear it, is a few hours past midnight. Then everything is utterly quiet, even the birds are quiet, and usually the only sound is the water pouring steadily over the stone dams. I think that the sobbing comes from a deep pool just upstream from one of those little stone dams. And when you hear it you know it's a woman. We Kickapoo know that it comes from *La Llorona*, the Crying Woman, and although she is not Kickapoo, she comes to visit us as she visits all the people who live beside a river with a few deep pools. Some say she is just an old wives' tale of Mexico, but I say she will never give up the ghost.

Her story is that she fell in love with "Cortez, The Killer Man," after he violated her. Maybe that was how she defended her soul, but, anyway, the raping made her crazy and she somehow fell in love with the very same "Killer Man" who had brutally raped her. And if that

wasn't bad enough, she was already a married woman. Suddenly, she believed she had become the one true wife of Cortez, as though she had never been married before. It couldn't have been worse if the devil himself designed it, but it got worse because she already had children of her own, and when Killer Cortez got through with his murdering and raping and stealing, he decided to move on without her.

She was nothing to him, but he was everything to her. She truly believed she had to follow him wherever he went, even though it was unlikely he would ever bother with her again. I don't know what happened to her husband, but "Cortez, The Killer Man," probably did him in.

Then one night, Cortez and his Soldiers of Fortune broke camp and moved out, and *La Llorona* moved right after them, but they were going fast, searching for their Golden Paradise, and she had her children tagging along. The children slowed her down so much that she couldn't keep up with those *Conquistadores*. And then came midnight, a midnight just like this, when everything is quiet as stones, and *La Llorona* took her children down to the river.

The river may have been the *Sabina* or the *Río Grand*, but it doesn't matter. It could have been any river, any place. They weren't going for a bath, I'll tell you that. Because what matters is she waded out into a pool with her two little babies and held them down until there was no more air left for them to breathe.

As the heads of her little children bobbed in the moonlight, it struck *La Llorona* as to what she'd done,

but it was too late. The limp bodies floated downstream with the current like dolls. They were gone forever, and *La Llorona* began her ceaseless moan. She forgot completely about the one she used to love, the Killer Cortez, and instead she started seeking everywhere for her little lost children. She would wander along a river, any river, moving from village to village, town to town, city to city, always seeking her two babies.

But if by chance she came upon a child alone, she would seize it by the hair and neck and stare deep into its eyes, searching for the gleam of her own lost children; but, unfortunately, she has never found that gleam, and in her anger and frustration she drowns the child that she happens to find.

It is for just this reason that throughout Mexico and even here in the Kickapoo village we tell the children not to go down to the river alone at night. Who knows why crazy people do the things they do? But whenever a child disappears people say *La Llorona* is not far off. And we all shiver and shake when we hear deep sobbing by a pool at midnight, just upstream from the little stone dams on our River *Sabina*.

Wiskano

I was about eight years old back then. My father and mother were working for those farmers up north, and they didn't even come back to *Nacimiento* when the weather got cold. Maybe they would never come back, not for a long time. They could send me a message that I should go up there. We could live with those Kickapoos up by Shawnee area, in Oklahoma. But back then I was living in *Nacimiento*, down in old *Mejico*, living only with my uncle.

And it was too rough, *hombre,* like a big struggle. We were battling just to keep disasters off our backs. Like grinding knives on some jagged stone. Like crawling uphill in a truck with broken springs and kingpins soft as dough. It was hard to steer, *hombre*, and we was burning oil, blowing oil all over the road. It was like me and my uncle were building a dam of stones. The stones were just as big as two hands, and we placed them together one by one on a river we knew was going to rise so fast that no dam could hold it, and we didn't want to hold it forever. We just wanted to slow that *río* down.

Early one morning I seen my uncle was still sleeping. I was stirring up the fire, trying to warm up the *wikiup*. The sun came peeking under the blanket we used for a door, peeking and creeping. I needed a little more firewood, so I pushed open the blanket. Then the sun broke right into our house, high against the back wall, and it struck the little chunk of mirror we had hanging there facing east on the center pole. That

mirror was shaped like the state of *Coahuila*. That's what my uncle told me.

He was calling me then. His voice followed that burst of sunlight, almost making it to the broken mirror too, but then kind of giving out and falling short, so I found myself looking in the dirt for his words.

"Hey, *mi tío,*" I said. (*Tío* means uncle in Spanish.) "I can't even hear you."

I tell you, *hombre*, usually mi *tío* moved so much like a gentle river. Flowing easy, curving out from the *Nogalera*, which is the source of all our clean water. And like our gentle river he was going wherever he was going, bending whichever way he was bending, and nothing much would ever stop him. He was the *Nogalera* too, you know? He was the place where the springs are; the sacred place located right smack dab in the heart of *Nacimiento*, feeding the *Río Sabina*. Pure Water, *Agua Puro*. The *Nogalera.* Our Place of Clean Fresh Water. And that was how my uncle usually was. And sometimes he was too wise, like looking right into my shirt pocket without lifting the flap.

"Hey Nephew, what are you hiding? You got me *chile pequin?"*

But one night my uncle got drunk. He stumbled and smashed his head on the center pole. And then he hit the floor, bleeding in the dirt. After that he dragged his feet around behind him like two plucked vultures.

"Puro Indio Yo! Puro Kickapu! No quemo aceite!"

"I am pure Indian. I am pure Kickapoo. I don't burn no oil." That is what he would constantly insist, yelling it at the top of his lungs or whispering it to

nobody in the dead winds of the night. But I would always have my reply ready, "No, *mi tío*, no," I would say, "You burning it."

Then he'd kind of smile, and even in the dark I could feel him smiling like he thought I was getting too smart, but soon enough he'd fall back to sleep again, maybe sleeping with his eyes open, maybe dreaming and twitching like our dog, Gerald, and then I'd be there all alone. Like I say, I was just a kid. I didn't know what to do.

But I do believe it was the next afternoon after he had fallen, a time sort of like now, just a regular afternoon when the birds call out to say something only they can understand, you know? I was getting hungry, like I always seemed to be getting hungry in those days. I guess the birds were hungry too. And then I felt something like a bug rush into my eye. It was a little bug, but it was lashing around in there. I felt like I was hit with a hot stone on my forehead and a rope was looping around and around me too. It was squeezing me from head to toe. Then my uncle got all stiff in his bed. His eyes popped open and he shot up like when you step on the end of a board. He was yanking me and dragging me all the way down to the *río*.

He threw water all over me and dunked me and shook me until I felt like I was turned inside out. I felt my feet up where my head should have been, but my head was like it was all blown apart with pieces flying up into the sky.

"Your eyes," my uncle yelled. "Open your damn eyes! Let me see them. A spirit has got inside you!"

But I didn't know where my eyes had gone.

You know what, *hombre*? Somehow, *mi tío* drove that spirit bug from out of my body like long ago I'd seen him chase a wild pig (that's like a *javelina*).

"That spirit was meant for me," my uncle said. "It meant to finish *my* life. But when it saw you, a young, strong boy, then how could it resist? It was too greedy. It's a good thing you're Kickapoo. I would not have been able to beat that spirit alone, but you were fighting like mad, kicking like crazy."

He looked at me good and long then. All the fighting with that spirit had worn him ragged.

"Go get Gerald," he said. "Put him by my bed. If that bug spirit comes again it will take Gerald instead of me or you."

So, I poured some gravy into an old hubcap we used for Gerald's pan. Gerald was our shepherd dog. And even today, when I think about Gerald, it makes me think of the U.S. President, Mr. Gerald Ford, because that's who we named him after.

I was swimming deep underneath my Río Sabina. I was dreaming a fish dream, but I crawled out of bed. I'd been sleeping like a big sack of stones was tied around my neck. I didn't hear no sound from mi tío. Maybe someone had come in the night and just stolen him. I crept over to his bed and looked into his face. His eyes flickered open and close, open and close, just like he was being electrocuted with a battery cable. I discovered something as his eyelids popped open. There was a cave where wind was tearing up loose rocks.

There was a Big-Foot too. Just like us Kickapoos, but big and hairy and running away holding a baby on her hip. I knew that bug spirit had come back for my uncle, and he was almost gone. I had to help him, just like he helped me. So I ran outside and I reached through the wind, and it took me a hundred years to get my hands through, but I did.

Then I saw my uncle again. He was outside in the bright sun. His hands were dipping into a red plastic bucket and coming up all greasy and black with used motor oil. He sloshed it on the back of a calf, and the calf would kick and run away. I guess he was chasing them cattles all over, wiping them down with old motor oil to keep the bugs from bothering them. And Gerald was there too, barking and running around. And it was like I could feel the air slipping out of Gerald's lungs and whistling up the long pink ridges of his mouth.

I guess my uncle had just changed his own oil while I was reaching through the wind. Who knows what he could do?

"Hey nephew, where you been hiding? You had me worried."

That's what my uncle said.

But later I remember I was wrapped up in his red blanket, looking at the woven *tule* rushes that made our roof. The reeds were woven together by the Kickapoo women, and they formed a perfect solid mesh. My mother had been part of the group of women who wove the *tule* into big square green mats that we placed over

the poles and saplings of our *wikiup*. These mats were excellent protection from the sun and rain. And they never leaked. Not like the tarpaper and plastic roofs of Eagle Pass that were made of black garbage bags and leaked all the time. But our *tule* mats were beautiful mats, like the Kickapoo women have woven these mats for thousands of years.

I could barely discern a wasp nest hiding up there in the rafters, just under the mat where the wood beams crossed. The wasps buzzed around, and I called to them because they were my little granpas. They told me I would be going to Shawnee area soon to live with my mother. And they let me see all kinds of things. Like I could see the tiny grains of dust floating in the air and they looked like boulders with many millions of gullies and rivers. In one of the gullies I could see a pony. Maybe it was to be my pony. It was clean and shining, stepping out of a deep pool of water. There were circles of fire-bracelets around its hooves. When my pony reared up the bracelets went right up too. I can play what I seen over and over again in my mind. It is a dream that is never forgotten. I feel it as close as the hair on my head.

Yes, hombre, I feel it as close as the hair on my head, blowing around and dancing like a pool of snakes. My hair grew so long, all down my body. It grabbed my knees first, taut like a rope. Then my legs felt like dry huizache wood. The blood inside me was air instead of blood. My own blood was draining out of me. If you can picture the muck under the hooves of cattle

where they drink by the river; that was my blood. In its place my veins filled with air. I felt a shadow moving. I heard something like feathers, many feathers, swooshing through the air.

That night my uncle and me wanted to go to *Muzquiz* to eat at a restaurant because we had to celebrate that both of us was still alive. We had some big appetites. We stretched out our giant wings and went directly up into the mouth of a blue thunderhead, and we rode like a pair of *wiskanos* into the town. *Wiskano*, that means bird.

We landed in *Muzquiz* by the little old cemetery. There were broken headstones toppled over everywhere with the names of the old *Mejicanos* of *Ciudad Melchor Muzquiz* mixing with the dust. It was not our belief to treat the dead people this careless way, but we let it all alone. It did not bother us. We came down exactly behind one big old gravestone, gleaming dull like a broken tooth. We tied up our hair and walked into town.

"Let's go get something to eat," said my uncle.

So, we walked by the old grey cathedral stuck there like a giant wart beside the plaza. Then we turned down a side street, narrow and dusty and dark. Soft candlelight was coming from behind adobe walls. There were windows in some of the walls with curtains made of faded red cloth. Pretty soon we came to *Chalio's* restaurant. It was our favorite. I guess I ate about two dozen warm tomatillos before I noticed my uncle was gone.

"Where's *mi tío*?" I asked.

Like always, *Chalio* was dressed up in his blond-woman's wig and pretty apron, which was his special style, and he answered me, but like always he was speaking in a very high tone of voice.

"I don't know where your *tío* is," he said.

"But he was just here," I said. "He came in here with me. We was just eating."

"No, my boy," said *Chalio*, kindly, like he always was. "You walked in here all by yourself, but you acted funny, like you were talking to your uncle, but you were talking to thin air."

Maybe, who knows? But maybe I could really grow up to be like my uncle. Chest of bull. *Pechos*. Big round belly. Sparking eyes. That would be me. Old Flintstone. Ready to laugh and be tender. Ready to battle for dear life. And I had a deepness too, like the bite I seen once on my uncle when things had gone wrong for good, like the way his bottom jaw came out and meant to stay that way until things got better or we forgot all about them and moved away, or until there was blood spilled all over the place. His teeth came out on the bottom, like the underbite on a wolf, and his eyes looked far away through the dirt and earth. Maybe I'd become that good too. But at night I knew my uncle would feel like crying. He would be drinking too much. I wanted to help him. I wanted to say, "Hey, why are you so sad?" But if I did, I knew he wouldn't be able to answer me even one word.

Me and my tío perched on some giant rocks and then I saw what he saw, and he was right, hombre, because it was sad, real sad, like hell or something, but also I knew it was like our destiny to be there, and to see it, and to know that we (of all people) were chosen to see this and to understand our destiny. Because we alone had remained true to it.

The rocks pushed up like great flatirons out of the ground. Down below was the city. Everything was made as you may have seen it many times before, like so many cities are made in the very same way, all in boxes and blocks and squares. And the people in the city hurried in straight lines, only to turn sharp and rush in other straight lines going to someplace else, many places, but exactly the same kind of places, over and over again. They did this for a living. They really had to keep moving or they would get burned up. Because their buildings were starting to explode. Even all the lakes and streams and waters were boiling. These people wanted to escape and crawl up onto those flatirons with us, and they reminded me of little doves, palomitas, popcorn, because they caught fire and blew apart and became like puffs of white smoke. Each person made a little pop of white with a dark kernel inside, and then the smoke blew away, vanishing in the fragrant air. Many of our Kickapoo people were there beside us, perched high on the flatirons. They were birds too, just like me and my uncle. We Kickapoos have always been birds. We are the black birds with red and orange tipped wings. And sometimes, in the wildest of places, our wings are bright yellow. Like I say, hombre, Wiskano. That means bird.

Toppin Onions

Mechimitota (Jim Salvator)

Chicapoo Juice

I was standing with *Chago Maestes*. Don't ask me what we were doing. The sun was warm. The air was bright. We had nothing to do but have a smoke and stand there. Maybe it was my chemotherapy day. I had cancer then, and I still do, so maybe we were just waiting around for my doctor's appointment so I could get that shot they liked to stab in the vein of my hand. I wouldn't get far after a shot like that. I'd be knocked down for a week with the chemotherapy pulsing through my blood like a drum that has no war to go to.

We could have been waiting around for our class to begin. I mean, believe this if you like, we were students then, two forty-year-old guys taking college classes with a bunch of teenagers; lots of teenagers and two old goats, that was us. And so you can imagine how we spent so much of our time just looking around. A pretty girl would walk by and I'd say, "Somebody did it right." *Chago Maestes* usually had a smart answer too, like "Sure, *hombre*, why don't you bring that home to your wife." I would have liked to bring that home, but not to my wife. I could imagine that pretty girl getting out of her clothes. I'd help her. I could see her lying down on the sofa with her underwear falling soft around her knees, falling soft like storm clouds around a Blue Mountain. And we was real quiet too, like we'd take our time, just suffering. We'd take a lot of time just suffering with our hands, and my mind would go off running to those bygone days, *hombre*, blazing across

the purple hills, blazing and suffering and blazing and suffering until there was no tomorrow, and there's not, is there? And I couldn't call my mind back because each time I opened my mouth I found that pretty girl's mouth right next to mine. I'd find her legs too, and just about all the different parts of her body kept me from using my mouth to call that wild donkey home. So, I let it go. You know how.

I wonder why it has to be like that. Why does *Kit-si-ata* (which is our Kickapoo word for God or Great Spirit) make me see all those pretty girls? Why does he like to play with me, and why does he like to see me suffering? And those pretty girls, why do they have to suffer too? Yes *hombre*, everybody's got to be suffering, but why?

So, you know, thinking of that pretty girl, I'd start to get that tingling feeling deep down inside me, but then, instead of feeling anything good, my hand would touch those crawling plastic tubes from my cancer operation. Those tubes, they were deadly cold. And then in just one sorry *momento* I'd forget all about that pretty girl because no matter how lucky I could be with any girl, I could never do what I wanted to do because my cancer operation left me just standing there, looking dumb. There were so many plastic tubes sticking through my guts. There was a plastic bag of urine hanging just below my belt, hidden by the long tail of my shirt. So, what could I do?

We were just standing there. Who cared if we were going to be late for whatever we had to be on time for? We always came in a little late, somehow we always

did, and it was like our style, the thing we had to do, or everyone would have gotten all excited and called up General Custer or something. But just the same, we started to get ourselves moving, and I tossed my cigarette onto the sidewalk.

"Hey spic, pick it up." I felt those words burn into my face before I saw who said them. Then I saw. Standing there like the Holy Trinity itself was Mister *Gabacho*, Mister *Gringo*, Mister *Huale* (*huale* means blond; *gabacho* means white man). And this guy who called me a spic was all three of them, rolled up into one big customized package, One Great Big White *Padre*, all standing straight as a spindle. And truly, this one, he looked about forty years old, like me, like my age, like *Chago Maestes* too, but this guy had short orange hair and the eyes of a falcon's ghost. *Chago Maestes*, as usual, was ready to jump him, but I calmed *Chago* down by catching his eyeballs, and he knew right away that this little business was going to be all my business.

I didn't have to tell Mister *Gabacho* I wasn't a Mexican. Maybe I am, maybe I'm not, but this one thing is sure, I'm a full-blood Kickapoo warrior, I'm a pure-blood Kickapoo *Indio*, but I was born in Mexico, and I speak the language of the People, *Me-thu-de-ne-nia*, which is *Ki-ki-ka-pa-wa*. And so Mexico is like a second mama to me. And sometimes my Mexico is a good mama, and sometimes she is a wild motherfucker, but my home that I built with my own two hands is right there, right *en* old *Mejico*.

So, you see *hombre*, sometimes I just don't know. I have two names. My Kickapoo name is *Ekoneskaka*, but

my Mexican name is the way most people know me here in Colorado. That name is *Aurelio Valdez Garcia*. That's what most people call me around here, except for my wife, *Marisol* (Mary Sue), because she's a full-blood Kickapoo too, and she calls me something else. Yeah, she calls me a lot of things. And my daughter, *Eurika,* she calls me Daddy. But, usually, I like to keep secret the fact that I'm a Kickapoo *Indio*. It's just easier if most people think I'm a *Mexicano*. Then I don't have to be explaining so much, like they always ask me, "Hey, what does your Kickapoo name mean?"

"It's a name," I say. "It's my name, *Ekoneskaka*. What does your name mean?"

That's how I answer them, and it mostly works to shut down such rude inquiries. I mean, nobody's ever heard of the Kickapoo *Indios* as a real live people. We're secret. We're unknown. We're quiet. We are. We are a true people, and nobody knows anything about us, and that is how we alone have escaped for such a long time and remained true to our sacred responsibilities.

Now, *hombre*, here is the big problem I was facing that day when I was standing with *Chago Maestes*. The white people say I am a pure *Mexicano*. My great grandpa and a whole bunch of other Kickapoos were warriors for the famous *Pancho Villa* back in the old days. We owned that *frontera* (the borderlands) and you better believe we still count it as our own. But the white people say if I am not a *Mexicano* then I am a pure *Chicano*, whatever that may be. I don't know, but maybe I am one. Or maybe I'm pure blood *Chicapoo Juice,* and

I'm dark skinned too, bronze-skinned, truly, and to Mister *Gabacho* that was all that mattered.

"Dirty spic, pick it up." That's what he said to me all right, and he kept saying it like a drill sergeant. And then he turned, but before he turned he walked back toward me and he shot out spit. He spit right at my feet, and when his juice hit the pavement it sounded like glass cracking. I kept thinking of Mork, you know, the Mork on TV, the one who comes from a planet where spitting is a compliment. It means, "Yeah, I like that." But what I got back then was no kind of compliment. I could smell the blood rushing up the white man's throat. Even though he didn't know me, or know anything about my people, I could feel the hate rushing out of him like the torn-loose wire. Maybe it was just that feeling that gave me what I needed as he turned to walk away. Because I walked two steps after him and I kicked. The sharp toe of my boot hit him square in the crack of his ass. He didn't turn around. He just stopped and sagged down a little, like somebody had smashed a pie in his face, so I kicked him again. Then he did turn around, and Christ, he was scared. And, like I say, I had cancer then and there was a plastic bag hooked onto me and plastic tubes crawling through my guts. I had to be careful, but then a group of students (who were just fooling around, like usual) folded in and circled to cover us. So, like the song says, it was "just me and Mister *Gabacho*," and that circle of kids became like a wall that I couldn't see over or get through. It was a wall with broken glass on top so I couldn't crawl out and escape.

Chago Maestes was talking real fast. "You're wearing that operation, *hombre*. You could die right here. *Basta!* Enough is enough. Let it go. *Mucho gusto*, right?"

But by then I was ready to kick again, and I didn't miss either. I caught him square in the *huevos* (that means eggs, or testicles) and he doubled over and I kicked him in the face and he struck the ground with one big kick for a blanket. I was ready to kick the living shit out of him, starting with his brains, but *Chago* grabbed me with his forearm real tight around my throat and dragged me out of there so fast I don't even remember crossing the street.

"Why'd you do it, *hombre*?" he said. "You're not Mexican, why you?"

We escaped into a little coffee shop, and then in a few moments I was almost calm, just sitting there with *Chago*, drinking *café*, with only a little shakiness to my bronze-skinned hands. And if you'd have asked me just then, I'd have said I was feeling pretty *tranquilo*, you know? *Bien tranquilo y todo eso*. Very cool, calm and collected. *Mucho gusto*.

But *Chago*'s question was always the same, "Hey, why you?"

I didn't even know "why me?" I almost lost my calm again because I kept scratching that scary place on my leg, just above my boot top, that place where I was getting real sure the cancer was pulsing into my skin, pulsing all through me and filling my whole body with poisonous sores. Maybe I'd hurt that Mister *Gabacho*.

Maybe I had, but I just sat there all the same. Then I thought I heard something like a buzzing in my ear, and then a voice. I heard my Great *Granpacito's* voice, the one I told you about, the one who was fighting on the side of *Pancho Villa* back in the old days. It was his *voz* all right, *claro con claro*, clear as a copper kettle when you play it with a stick or a spoon, and I just closed my eyes to listen.

Sa-sa-ke
sing water
sing fish-water moon
yellow fish-water moon
Open bird
open sun
open bird-sun song

Yeah, that was my Great *Granpacito's voz* all right. But it sounded like a bird too. "*Sa-sa-ke*," he was singing. (*Sa-sa-ke*, that means snake.) But then all of a sudden I was home again in *Nacimiento*. I was seeing myself from a long time ago, just as a boy.

It was spring in our village and still I was going to school. The bus driver would stop for the gate and I would jump down to open it for him. Sometimes I would trick him. I would throw open the gate and then I would run down the road away from the bus all the way home to the village. Back then I had a game. I played by myself because nobody knew I was hiding right there in the village instead of going to school. I would steal a little bag

from my Aunt Kika's house and dart away into the trees and no one would ever see me. I would climb the trees and look at the little birds in their nests, and then I would put the baby birds in my bag. Sometimes I would collect dozens of baby birds in one day. But then I would take them down to the road and wait until I heard the school bus coming, and then like a crazy boy I would dump all the little birds in front of the school bus and run away. Also someone had left a saddle on the bridge, and I threw it into the mud below, and I watched it sink. I saw the quick mud was pretty strong, but I still went down under the bridge and dug around on my hands and knees and found dozens of turtle eggs in the warm sandy bank. They were round and soft like warm tortillas. And I tore open some turtle eggs and played with their yolks in the soft grainy edges of the mud. Then I tossed all the eggs into the mud, but they bubbled on top and didn't sink. They were too light, so I threw some sticks on top of them, and then I threw rocks at them too until they were all sucked down. This took me all day and then it was night and I was walking home.

Sa-sa-ke
sing water
sing fish-water moon
yellow fish-water moon

I like feathers and I like shells. Maybe I did those things as a boy because I hated school. I was the only Kickapoo who went to school. But at school I was the only Indio, the only Indian boy, and everybody said I

was tonto, like stupid. I was not stupid, but I had trouble with the language. I could hardly speak a word of Spanish back then. Maybe I have this bad luck today because of what I did back then. I have my cancer now. So, I remember the song of my Great Granpacito. I sing it right now to tell the little birds that I like feathers. I make this song to tell the mother turtles that I also like shells. I make this song because my body is falling apart. When I die the pieces of my body that have already been cut away will still be searching for me. My intestines are looking for me now. My stomach is looking for me. Maybe the mother turtle makes her home in my stomach. Maybe the little birds eat my intestines.

Yes, I can see the baby birds. They are flying by the yellow moon, and some of my intestines are hanging from their sharp little beaks, trailing a long way over the trees and river and around the yellow horns of the fish-water moon.

I can see my own intestines, trailing out at a very long distance, touching the mud where the mother turtle lays her eggs in my amputee stomach. And the mother turtle also has my intestines in her razor-sharp beak. She also wants to eat. The turtle and the bird are eating up my intestines. The mother turtle is digging around in my stomach. The mother turtle buries her eggs in the mud of my stomach.

I like feathers. I like shells. I want the turtle and the birds to bring me back all the pieces of my body that the surgeon cut away. The surgeon, the surgeon, all dressed in white. He was the one who amputated

my stomach. He threw the pieces of my intestine into a dumpster on the other side of the big sliding doors

Sa-sa-ke
sing water
sing fish-water moon
yellow fish-water moon
Open bird
open sun
open bird-sun song

Then my Great *Granpacito's voz* got torn away from me and I heard something more like thunder blasts of static. Then it was just *Chago Maestes' voz* that I heard, pretty clearly, talking like a DJ who was also my friend.

"Hey *hombre*," he said, "you acting kind of strange. You better come back in and drink up your *café*, you know?"

Poor old *Chago*, but I guess he was frustrated because I had walked out some door in my mind. I didn't know that *Chago* had followed me, but there he was, standing right next to me, looking the same as ever.

We were standing just outside the coffee shop, right by the busy street.

"Hey *hombre*, don't just get up and run like I'm the fuckin *chotas*. Don't just leave me sitting there like I'm the *policía*. And when you got to leave someplace, how come you forget to pay?"

Chago's eyes were all glittery.

"That waitress," he says, "you know, the one you like, she wants a little silver, *hombre*, *pura plata*."

But I just looked blank-faced at old *Chago*, studying his glittery eyes. Then, for a minute, I was almost feeling normal. I looked back toward the busy road. I was watching a red van as it curved downhill.

"Oh yeah," says *Chago*, "Really neat van, *hombre*. I like that van too, but hey, come on. Let's go back inside, drink *café*, make sure everything's real *tranquilo*, you know? Like the *chotas*, *sabes*, the fucking cops? They might grab you if you just stand here on the fucking street like a fucking *puto*." (*Puto*, that means male prostitute.) But I didn't move an inch.

"Hey *Chago*," I finally says, and I was still watching that van disappear into the traffic. "You know what?"

"Fucking what?" he says.

"I'm interested in that van, *hombre*, I really am."

"Yeah, I fucking know," says *Chago*. "That's fucking cool. That's a real fucking cool cherry red van."

"And you know what?" I says.

"What the fuck?" says *Chago*.

"I heard some *voces en mi cabeza*," I says. "I heard voices in my head."

"Yeah, fucking sure, *hombre*," says *Chago*. "Now here this! Fucking *Aurelio Garcia* is now

hearing some fucking *voces* with no fucking TV or fucking radio for a fucking mile around!"

"But no kidding, *hombre*," I says, "it was my Great *Granpacito*, but his *voz* faded off real fast, and then another *voz* just started to poke into my head like a wire. All kinds of thundery static, *hombre*."

"*Jesús-fucking-Cristo*," says *Chago*. "Come on, let's get our fucking asses off this fucking street, *sabes*? Fucking *chotas* might come fucking around here. They're probably looking for your fucking ass right now! Maybe you just castrated that *gabacho-hijo-de-puta*-piece-of-shit, you know? *Fuímanos*, *Aurelio*! Let's go!"

That was my *Chago* all right. He loved to say "*Fuímanos*!" which means "We're gone!" or "Let's get the hell out of here!" That was the funny way we talked back then, mixing Spanish and English and saying things all wrong because it sounded funny to us. What the hell, *hombre*, saying things just right was tricky work anyways. And *Chago* always called me *Aurelio*, which is my *Mexicano* name, *Aurelio Valdez Garcia*.

But I still just stood there, looking out at the busy street, following with my eyes the place where the van had disappeared. And I wanted to keep talking about it.

"You know what, *Chago*?" I says, looking into his glittering eyeballs, "I think maybe that second *voz* I heard inside my head come straight out of that cherry van."

"Oh fucking yeah," says *Chago*, "sure fucking thing, like fucking *se-gur-o*, like maybe you got a fucking CB radio smacked right inside your fucking brain? You crazier than shit, *hombre*!"

"*Sí,*" I says, "Yes, I maybe do have a brand-new CB stuck right inside my head, and the program I'm picking up must be coming from that cherry-red van."

Because by then I heard the *voz* from the van real clearly, and all the static had faded away, and the new *voz* was like vicious, like some kind of Paul Harvey radio man with a bad case of rabies, and it wiped out the song of my Great *Granpacito* so I couldn't hear it no more. Instead, the new *voz* just jabbed at me like a cow prod.

Hey Tonto, cómo estás? This is your old good buddy, El Lone Rangerino of the Cherry Van. You hear me loud and clear? That's my boy, Tonto. How are the wife and kid? How goes the stealing and robbing and killing? How's the taste of human flesh? Are the blond tresses still swaying from your war belt?

Some of these bleeding hearts tell me to feel my conscience because I have treated thee, Poor Tonto, in a barbarous manner, but I've seen one thing they haven't seen. I've seen a wild Indio. I've seen my whole family broken and butchered by wild Indios. I've seen my own little children carried away by wild Indios and brought up to believe that robbery was meritorious, that cold-blooded murder was a praiseworthy act. I've had my own dear and rugged

limbs beaten and bruised and mangled and burnt with fiendish ingenuity by ye gentle savages. My own scalp was ruthlessly torn from my head. And I am one of the few to survive such an operation, so I can personally tell you, Poor Tonto, ye gentle savage, that my naked brain was subjected to the wind and rain and weather, and it really bent my mood.

But before I sealed up my head once again with polyurethane-crystal-meth, I installed a super-duper-power-pack CB transmitter just for torturing you, Tonto, with the power of my righteous megawatts.

And Tonto, no doubt ye wonder how that CB receiver was so secretly installed inside your brain? Well, I was right there by the operating table when they put you under the knife and removed your cancerous gut matter. Yes-sir-e, I personally wired you up from the guts to the skull, Tontoso. So happy trails.

Then I heard some kind of gurgling sound. And I figured the *Lone Rangerino* (or whoever it was) had just experienced a weird articulation spasm, like choking on a chicken bone lodged sideways in his throat.

"Hey *hombre*," says *Chago Maestes*, "you really fucking crazy! You Chicapoo Juice all right, but what the fuck?"

So, once again, I was hanging with *Chago Maestes*. But now he was standing over me, looking about the same from that angle. I guess I hadn't wandered so far. I was down just a few blocks from

the coffee shop. I just didn't remember how I got there, or how long I'd been there, or what I'd been doing. But I found myself sitting on the curb with my feet in the gutter and a thread of drool trailing out my mouth in the sun-filled breeze.

So, I got up and wiped off my mouth. And me and *Chago* turned around again and started walking back to the old coffee shop. I was rubbing my head, looking same as ever. Me and *Chago*.

"Hey *hombre*," says *Chago*, "what's happening to you? You look kinda like you just got mauled by a chubby *senorita, no*? You okay, *hombre*?"

That was what *Chago* always called a pretty girl. He called her a chubby *senorita*. We could laugh a long time, like thirty minutes, easy, laughing like little children. But I couldn't answer *Chago* at this time. I was buzzing on some CB radio frequency I didn't even want to hear, and lucky for me *Chago*'s voice rolled under it like a river. (I know. It's hard to believe that *Chago*'s voice could ever sound good. Usually it sounded like he was chewing shit, you know, but somehow just then it sounded pretty good.) I couldn't answer him, though, even if I wanted to, because I kept listening for my Great *Granpacito'*s voice. I kept wondering if he would come back to me and explain what the hell was going on around there. I wanted to hear from him, and I wanted to pay him my respects.

Jesus Christ, *hombre*, what was I doing up there in Boulder, Colorado? I guess I was up there by the university because I was a student. It's hard to believe, I know. Why is anyone a student? Don't ask

me. I was the first one of my people to ever get through high school. In *Muzquiz*, *Mexico*. That's where I graduated. Maybe I was a student again now, forty years old, because there was a chance for me to help my people, if they wanted my help. But I was pretty sure they didn't. Maybe I was a student because for a short time there was plenty of grant money, and those white people needed a few of us *Indios* around to make them look intelligent. But I knew I didn't belong there at the University of Colorado. It was hard to say where I belonged. Because I was partly educated along the white man's line, but because of this education my own people didn't trust me, and they were very wise people. So maybe they were right. Maybe I didn't even trust myself. Maybe I was going to a university just to see what would happen.

Sure, yeah, *hombre*, that's why. So, there I was, standing where I didn't belong, which could have been anywhere in Boulder, I guess, waiting for the next thing to happen. Then that cherry van with cruised by me again real fast but like in slow motion too. I noticed it had beautiful chrome mag wheels, but the same damn voice shouted in my head, *"Hey you, dirty spic, get off the street!"*

I knew I was getting pretty damn crazy when I started to believe that *voz* was really coming from the van. Sure, I'd been in the hospital. Sure, I really did have an operation on my colon cancer, but that was in my guts, not in my head. Nobody put a damn CB in my head.

"Hey spic, dirty spic, what did you steal today?"

I kept hearing the voice making announcements. I watched the van turn west, and then I started walking west too. I didn't really expect to see it again, but, just in case it made a turn, I could maybe get a good bead on the driver. I would ask him his name. I really wanted to know. But also by then *Chago Maestes* had left me. He was nowhere to be seen. I didn't even know how long I'd been standing there. But Chago must of gave up on me and gone home to his wife, I guess, to have some goodies. So, after walking about four blocks west, I did see the van again. It turned back toward me and the driver was parallel parking on the slope of a street lined with big trees and bushes, and there were big houses set back in long, beautiful, green yards. The driver got out and started walking like he had somewhere to go. I was surprised when I got a good look at him. He was pale all right, but it was pretty funny because he looked just like the other guy I'd almost killed that day, like he was his twin brother or something.

So, I waited for him where he couldn't see me, hiding inside some thick green bushes just as tall as me. I just wanted to ask him who he was. I didn't want any trouble, *hombre*. I swear I didn't, but I was pretty upset, you know, and I think maybe I wanted to scare him a little. Then he got to about one foot from where I was hiding and I stepped out and greeted him face to face.

"*Ay, muy buenas tardes, señor*," I said, "Good afternoon, sir."

And he just stopped walking like he had somewhere to go. I smelled something funny then, too,

like he had built a fire right there on the spot. (That means he shit his pants. We Kickapoos like to say "build a fire" when we mean "take a shit.") So, to be sure, the odor made me want to back off. Wouldn't you? But then all of a sudden he turned and ran, and for some damn reason I started to run after him. I pursued him. You always got to pursue, but I had that cancer bag hanging from my colostomy, and just like before (when I had kicked that other white guy, his twin, the other *gabacho*) I had to be real careful that my colostomy bag didn't bust or my tubes get torn out.

I don't know what I was thinking. But I wasn't being careful. I was in pursuit. That's all I could comprehend. I grabbed the back of his shirt and it slowed him down a little, and then he made his big goof. I mean, if he'd kept running and let his shirt tear, then it would have been all right. I most likely would have stopped and just stood there holding the piece of his torn shirt and catching my ragged breath. Maybe I would have waved to him, kind of smiling, you know, or shook my fist, kind of threatening, you know, but I would have let him go. Probably true, *hombre.* That's what I think. Scaring him would have been enough for me. But he really goofed. He didn't keep running. He turned around fast and caught me in the ear with his fist.

Now, I don't carry a knife at the university, and I didn't know why, but for some reason I was carrying my blue Bic pen in my hand like it was a knife, and, just as he turned around and smashed me, you better

believe I rammed that pen clean into his neck, and I felt it pop and glide pretty deep, so I left it there.

Then he looked depressed. His mouth opened like a hole. He looked down at my hands, and that was his second big goof because I kicked him in the *huevos* and he went down hard on his back and this time there was nobody around to pull me away. *Chago Maestes* was long gone away by then.

So, if truth be told, I guess by the end of our encounter there was pretty much blood on the street. I guess there was. I got him real good, too good, but I don't know why I dragged him over to his van. Maybe I wanted to check out the CB radio in there. Maybe I wanted to hide his body. I got the van keys out of his pocket and, like I say, he was a bloody pulp. I yanked him up by his ears and threw him inside the van and then I jumped into the driver's seat and drove around for a while, you know, just driving around, playing with the CB radio, calling up every good-buddy I could think of, and listening in on what the police were saying.

It was a big surprise to me. I was okay. I felt pretty good, you know? Don't ask me why. Crazy, you know? Maybe just crazy. But I'd never had a real CB that could pick up police communications before. I learned soon enough that nobody had reported our encounter or even complained about blood all over the street. I was glad it was getting dark. It would be night soon. Then the blood on the street would be hidden until morning. But, of course, I got a little *ansioso*, like anxious. I thought maybe a friend of this

gabacho would recognize his van and make a report that something funny was going on, like some dirty *Mexicano* was at the wheel instead of the Grand Wizard of the KKK, or whoever he was. Also, to tell the honest truth, I was getting a little tired. After the police reports were over there was nothing really interesting coming in on the CB, and nobody was like interested in making radio contact with me. But, keep on the sunny side, you know? My head was free and clear, and the radio was in my hand, not in my head, and I was in control of it. I sure didn't hear any more voices making strange announcements about me or calling me spic.

So, I drove that pretty van up Baseline Road onto Flagstaff Mountain, and I was going to leave it there in the public parking area. I was just going to leave it there and walk home by myself. I love to walk, even a long way, even at night. I can walk for miles and miles, all day and all night too, because I am Kickapoo, you know? But, *hombre*, that van was just too pretty to leave up there for anybody to come along and steal. Also, the van's fresh cargo was a big concern of mine. So, I just slipped myself back into the driver's seat and headed for a curve with a cliff that I knew had a pretty deep drop. I stopped by the edge of the curve and waited for a chance when I couldn't see nor hear no other vehicles around that area. And it was all dark by then. Just the lights from the City of Boulder glowing like speckles on a fish. (Jesus Christ, *hombre*, I hate fishing white-man style up in Boulder, like fishing on the fist-sized-sharp-grey rocks up by Barker Reservoir. That kind of fishing sets you up to fail,

twisting lines all over the place. Back in *Nacimiento* we fish all the time, but with bows and arrows, and even with bare hands, and catching fish is successful.) Anyway, from my little perch up on Flagstaff Mountain I could see a lot of people in Boulder who were probably back home by then, sitting on their sofas, watching TV and eating warm food. That's where I should have been. That's probably where *Chago* was already. I kept wishing I was at home too, like *Chago*, eating *blanquillos* and watching TV. But, it was not to be.

So, I shifted the van into neutral and got out and gave it a hefty shove. It sort of hurt my colostomy to push so hard, but I just kept pushing and sure enough the van rolled right off the edge of the cliff and crashed down below. It didn't burn up though, and I was kind of surprised by that. I'd seen most vehicles burn when they went over cliffs on TV, so I expected a big explosion and fire to destroy everything. But now I know what it's really like, and I can tell you from firsthand experience that not all vehicles going over cliffs explode and burn like sons of bitches, and they don't always make a hell of a lot of noise neither. That pretty van just went down nose first, and then it went over and over, muffled by the heavy brush that was growing up the side of the flatiron. Then it just stopped, propped up on a boulder, laying upside-down. Hey, I learned something that day.

So, I walked back home. Because I love to walk. I watched the news and I read the paper, but I never heard nothing about it. A lot of days went past. I didn't know what to think. Probably, it never really happened. Or maybe I dreamed it all. Or it's a cold case, like a

popsicle, you know? Either way, I left the university not too long after. The seasons was changing again, and I wanted to see my home in *Nacimiento.* I wanted take a bath in the cool soft waters of *mi río*.

Mi Río Mi **River**

What is the *río, hombre*? The *río es Naci*. The river is *Nacimiento.* My birthplace. *Y después es el Río Sabina*. And later it's the River *Sabina*. The *nepi*, the water, comes out from our ground. This *nepi* is mine. *Es Kickapu también.* Yes, it's Kickapoo too. But ninety-nine-point-nine percent of the Kickapoo people around here think it belongs to the Mexican Government. But I know, the *río* is *Nacimiento*, and then later, after our land ends, it is the *Río Sabina*. Then the Mexicans can have it. But here it is *Naci.* And *Naci* is Kickapoo Country, Kickapoo Nation, like Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Illinois and Missouri, like our whole Kickapoo Nation, like one big whole country. And so our *río es Naci* too.

Sí, hombre, *sí,* our *río es Ki-ka-pu*.

El Mismo Río

Oh, these people around here, these Kickapoos, many of these people believe our *río* gets warmer to make us warm in the winter, but in the summer they say it gets cooler to make us feel cool. "Oh that's a good *río*. It's happy and kind to us." That's what many of these Kickapoo people around here will tell you. But the truth is that the *río* remains the same temperature the whole year around. Other things are changing, but the *río* remains the same. That's what I know. I've tested it. I have come out here with a thermometer at different times of the year. You know, like a scientist.

What do you think? You think these Kickapoo peoples are right? No, they feel the *río* different because the temperature of the air around them is different. The trees and birds are different. *Chile pequin* is different. *Chaparrito prieto* is different. Those peaches and figs are different too. Sometimes they're juicy. Sometimes they're hard and green. Even *La Llorona* comes and goes. Everything around the *río* changes every year during the different seasons. But the *río* doesn't change. It remains.

Mucha Nepi

Dams can be built in *Naci*. Like little ones that we build from rocks. Yeah, we just build them with our handiwork. The rocks are not too big. Like no bigger than one Kickapoo can pick up and throw. Yeah, that's pretty big. Bigger than you'd think. These Kickapoos like to wrestle with cattles too.

But the rocks aren't too big. They slow that *río* down. Because it's wild. It's a wild *río, hombre*. It's like *na-ná-he* too (like a natural wilderness) because it jumps wild out of the ground and runs wild out of the mountain. *Río na-ná-he*. (River of Wilderness.) *Sí, hombre*, something like that. *Mucha nepi*. A lot of wild running water.

So, the rocks we pile up to slow that wild *río* down. And we make like pools for swimming and taking a daily bath and washing our clothes. But that's the only kind of dams and pools you'll see around here. And then there are some irrigation *canales* too. Yes, *canales* are like canals. *Son muy buenos*. They are very good to bring our *nepi* to us. To our houses and to our *wikiups*. And to our gardens and to our fields. See, take a look around, there's some beautiful fields around here.

My father-in-law, *José*, you know him. He's growing a lot of corn and beans. He sells it over there in *Muzquiz* too. And we have real good gardens. Tomato. Squash. Zucchini. And watermelon. *Sandía,* watermelon, *sí, hombre*. You remember?

Sandía

Sandía. *La* Water*melón*. *Nepi. Nepi melón*.

Sí, señorini, you ate that *sandía* at my mother-in-law's house. So beautiful, remember? The sun was blasting white and yellow on her giant green garden and the *río* water flowed right through there, irrigating those light green *melones*.

And we was visiting over there, just standing in the shade of her summertime *wikiup*, cutting water*melones* wide open and bright juicy pink on a worn wooden platform that was made like a table or bed and constructed as part of her porch. Her summertime *wikiup* is built square with a tall roof that comes to a single peak. (But her winter *wikiup* is oval shaped, and it has perfect rounded walls that make it look like an oblong basket turned upside down. It is covered drum tight with *tule* reeds that were woven into giant green mats by the Kickapoo women. And you know the green color of the mats starts to turn into a color like brown buckskin after a short time out in the weather of *Naci*.) And the summertime *wikiup* is covered sometimes with the very same *tule* mats we use in the winter, like we just move them over, summer to winter, winter to summer, and the summertime *wikiup* has this rectangular porch with several wooden platforms like I told you about, constructed into the *wikiup*'s design, and there's maybe even a swing under the long porch roof where you can wrap up a baby real tight and swing that Kickapoo child as high and fast as you please.

Yes, *hombre*, you also ate those peaches over there at my mother-in-law's house. Just like she makes them and gives them to you in a dish of sweet juice. And remember? We was sitting under her trees, *señorini*, under those peach trees and fig trees outside in the shade, just sitting on old metal folding chairs, rickety and rusty and brown. We were all filled up with sweet juice and peaches. And sure, it was still maybe one hundred and twelve degrees in the shade all around us, and the irrigation *canales* with our *nepi* was flowing right by there, feeding all the peach trees and fig trees and water*melones*. Feeding the whole big garden with the beautiful *sandía*. And we were feeling real good. That's *Naci.* It's fantastic there. By the irrigation canal. It's like paradise. So beautiful. *Fan-tas-ti-que!* Magnificent in the shade, *hombre*, *Mag-ni-fi-que*, eating those peaches from my mother-in-law's house. I planted those peach trees myself.

Canales

We can make like *canales* from the *río* too. We make them with rocks. We build these kind of irrigation *canales*. And some of these *canales*, I guess you call them *canals*, they can be pretty long. Maybe two hundred yards, but we make them out of the same rocks too. Just building them up. They run along with the current of the *nepi* so they don't cut across the *río* like the little dams, but then after a while they veer away from the *río* and feed our *nepi* into other *canales* that go to our *wikiups* and fields and gardens all over the village. And whether we build these dams and *canales* real fast or real slow, it costs us a lot of work, but on the hot days the work can be fun. You believe it?

Los Congrejos

Hey, watch out for those *congrejos! Sí*, little granpas. What do you call them? Like a lobster, yeah. Crawdaddys. Watch out for those little guys. They'll chase you. They'll give you a pinch. *Sí,* yeah, this is their *río* too. It belongs to the *congrejos* too. It's their *mucha aqua*. It's their *mucha nepi. Los congrejos* are hiding in the rocks of our little dams. *Sí*, right there in the cracks between the rocks. *Sí, Las piedras*. *Sí.* We just pile them up a little bit, very carefully, to change the *río* so we can use it, and then our granpas use the dams too. We pile up those *piedras* and then *los congrejos* move in like it's a brand new *apartamento*, first-month-free, pets welcome.

Nepi o Capi

What did you say, *hombre*? Do I know who your God is? *Y qué viva Jesús, qué no?* Like, "long live Jesus," right? But right here by the *río* we've got *mucha nepi, mucha aqua*, plenty of water. But no, I don't know who your God is. What did you say? You say *capi* is your God? But there's no *capi* around here now, *hombre*. No coffee here, nowhere. This is *el río*. You say *capi* is your God? No? Just kidding?

I don't know about this guy. Maybe this guy's a little too much *esse rojo*. You know, red ass. That means white man. *Capi* is your God? You got me that time, *hombre*. *Sí, Señorini*, you got me.

Nepi of the *Tuna*

Nepi Nepi. The Water. Where do you find it? Where does it come from? *Nepi.* Finding it can be a big job when you're walking alone way out there in the *na-ná-he*, way out there in the wilderness of the Blue Mountains. *Sí*, way out there! Deep in the *chaparrito prieto*, deep in the dark-branched chaparral.

Sometimes, you'll never see a drop of *nepi* out there, but it's around. It's hiding. And sometimes it's right under your hands, *Señorini*, like hiding right inside those *tunas*, like right inside those prickly pears. Right there, *hombre*. You got it.

What do you call *la tuna*? A prickly pear, no? Is *La Tuna* your God? No? Okay, just kidding. We call that prickly pear *la tuna*. *Sí, la tuna*. Okay. But how do you get that *nepi* out of *la tuna*. That is the tricky part.

You got to have some kind of rag or handkerchief or red bandana or something. Like see, you pull a red bandana out of your pocket. You find a plump red *tuna*. Real red. *Sí*, red like the sky in *Nacimiento* when the sun goes down. *Sí*, sometimes it gets real red like a ripe *tuna*.

And, *hombre*, this next step is *muy importante*. Because you got to carefully remove all those little mean stickers by shaking your bandana all around *la tuna*, like you would shake in your boots if you were Colonel Ranald Mackenzie all by himself when a Kickapoo war party comes charging over the hill. You would shake it pretty fast, no? *Sí*, you would. But it would be too late. Too late, *hombre*! The Kickapoos win again! Shake that bandana, *hombre*, shake it like crazy!

Now, by shaking your bandana all around the *tuna* you are trying to get all the little teeny-weeny-tan-colored stickers off that prickly pear. You got to get every single one of them off. It's not so hard. Just keep shaking that cloth like a madman. You've got to do it right, or you're going to feel very sorry, *Señorini*, because if you miss just one of those little stickers it might get stuck inside you, but you can't see where. It kind of disappears inside your finger and you can feel it but you can't see it. Oh yeah! Just like a Kickapoo warrior. It'll cause you a lot of *problemitas*. So, *hombre*, you got to shake that old bandana real good.

Next thing is to take your chance and pick that *tuna* right off the head of the *nopal*. Grab it! That *nopal* cactus thinks you're pulling off one of her limbs, so you better be quick, *hombre*, or she'll stab you good. If that happens you can just say *adiós* to your hand for about a hundred years. *Sí*, just forget about it.

Like remember when we were driving from *Nueva Rosita* to *Muzquiz*? We were out there by Highway 53, drinking some pops by that low adobe wall under the sky. It was stretching out there like three thousand miles of turquoise far into the desert and clouds and Blue Mountains. And that adobe wall had a little door that went into a poor little yard. Remember, there was those two little *chiquita* girls crouching down over there by the wall. They were tight by the road too. Their wagon was parked there. Their *burro* was screaming like it had good news, like there was free lottery tickets popping up from the ground, burning as hot as *chile pequin*. Remember?

It must have been over a hundred degrees in the shade. Their wagon, remember their wagon? That old flatbed wagon made of grey wood. I guess you call that a buckboard *vagón*. One hundred percent Mexican Juice! It had white wall tires. They were smooth and bald. They looked like old radial wide-treads about to burst. And those little *chiquita* girls were crouched down underneath their *vagón*, keeping out of the blistering sun. And remember? They were wearing pretty pastel dresses. One pink and one like yellow gauze. Their hair was real black and long and fixed in braids. They had brown skin. *Indio* skin. Like us.

You see, most of the Mexican Juice around here *es puro Indio*. That's right, pure Indian, but they don't know from where. *Aztecas, Zacatecas, Apacheria, Comancheria*, who knows? But they are just like us. Of course, if you ask them, they won't admit it because they don't remember. But you can see it when you look at them. They're just like us, really. One hundred percent *Indio* Juice. There's a lot of them too.

And those two little *India chiquitas*? Their pretty dresses look like flowers or something. Really, *hombre*. It was like that. They looked like *pitahayas*, you know, like pink and yellow cactus flowers. Hey, maybe they were going to church? Remember, it was Sunday. Those Mexican Juice will be going to church on Sundays. That's okay. We don't mind. They don't bother us. They've learned about us.

But something was wrong over there. There was some kind of problem with those two little *chiquitas*. They were crouched down out of the sun all right. They

were smiling and happy too, but their mouths and most of their faces were red. Their hands were the same. And their wrists and their arms right up to the elbow were all stained in red. Can you believe it? Real Red Girls! Their pretty pastel dresses, all clean for the church, were covered with those same red blotches as their faces and arms, bursting out in giant polka dots like our sunset clouds in dusty old *Naci*.

You know what, *hombre*? That was the fault of the very *nepi* I'm trying to tell you about. The *tuna* was to blame. Its juice was squirting all over them, but they didn't care. They had stopped their *vagón* to get down and eat some *tunas*. They were dying of thirst. The *tunas*, a lot of them, were right there beside the adobe wall, so ripe they were glowing like coals of *huizache*. Those two little girls probably thought they saw some of the most beautiful, juicy *tunas* in all of *Coahuila*. Big as, what did you say? Golden apples? Yeah, something like that. They couldn't pass them by. Who could?

And remember? Their *burro* was screaming because he ate some of those *tunas* too, but before the little girls could brush away all the stickers for him. Poor *burro*. *Pobrecito! Ay, qué lástima me das!* Poor little *burro*! I pity you. But there they all were. The little red *India* girls under the *vagón*, and the *burro* screaming better than *Pancho Villa's* wives on the warpath. Remember? *Sí*, *la tuna* is to blame.

But, also, *la tuna* will save your life when you're out walking around, maybe hunting, and you're way out under the melting sun in *na-ná-he*. Then (when you're dying for water) maybe you don't care about getting all

red. But now, the question for us is how are you going to get the *tuna's* juicy *nepi* into your mouth without becoming red. Red Man. *Sí.* You don't want to be a Red Man, right? Well, it's pretty simple, *hombre*, just listen in. You got to peel it. Yeah, peel it, like *na-na-he*. No, not *na-ná-he*. But *na-na-he*. Remember. *Orange*. Peel it like you peel the orange, *na-na-he*. (Okay, wait a second. Let me back up. *Na-ná-he* means wilderness in the Kickapoo language, but *na-na-he* in our language means *orange*, like the fruit, orange. Sort of sounds like *naranja* in *español*, which also means orange. No? *Sí*? Yes, in the Kickapoo language you use an accent in your voice to make *na-ná-he* (wilderness). But *na-ná-he* is not the same thing as *na-na-he* (orange), which has no accent on the second syllable. See? The Kickapoo language makes a lot of sense, just like the English language.)

Well, anyway, once you clean the stickers off the *tuna* then you peel it. The skin is very delicate, maybe a lot more delicate than an orange (*na-na-he*). So, I carefully take my jackknife to start peeling the skin and I use my little blade to peel it off in pieces about the size of a thumb, peeling all the way around it very happily. I peel it so carefully that I keep all the *nepi* inside the *tuna* until I'm ready to pop it in my mouth. That way I don't puncture the fruit and get it squirting red juice all over me. See, looks easy, no? But *hombre*, this peeling part is maybe the hardest part to learn. See? It doesn't take too long, once you know how. See, thirty seconds! Five hundred years of practice! Be patient. You got to have the patience of us Kickapoos waiting for the Texans to

discover paradise in outer space, you know? Then maybe they'll leave us alone.

Sí, patience. That's what those little *India muchachas* forgot too. That's why they dug right in and tried to peel the *tunas* with their greedy little fingers. But how can you blame them? Okay, maybe someone will blame them. Maybe later their mother will be angry. Their pastel Sunday dresses will be no good anymore for going to church. But the little girls were thirsty for *tunas*, and if you really think about it, what good is a pretty dress to a thirsty girl?

Canícula

One time we discussed lining our *canales* here in *Naci* with cement. I wanted to do this, but the Kickapoo people voted against me. So instead I planted a lot of fruit trees and these pepper trees right next to our *canales*. I planted the figs, all kinds of them. Hey, they taste real good. Eat one, *hombre*. Probably you never tasted one like that. Green on the outside. Big like what you say? Golf ball? *Sí*. And inside yellow. Then it is red like *Colorado* around the seed. That's the taste, *hombre*. How do you describe it? What kind of words? I forget. Yeah, ambrosia. Kind of like the God. So beautiful.

And peaches too. I planted a lot of them all around these *canales*. But all these trees need plenty of water. *Nepi. Sí*. Same with the pepper trees and all these plants growing along all these *canales.* They get their *nepi* from our *río.* And they make it like shady and beautiful. *Mag-ni-fi-que! Beau-ti-fi-que! Fan-tas-ti-que!*

There's like a real cool place right over here. It's a nice place to be during the melting days of summer. *Sí, canícula.* That's what we call it here when it gets real hot. Yes, the dog days, when the sun is melting everything. So, these *canales* and these trees do us a lot of good.

La Nogalera

Ejidos Morelos, you know? That's the Mexican government farming cooperative located nearby to *Nacimiento*. But we're not like those *Morelos* people. We got no big pipelines and no cement dams. None can be found in *Naci*.

Just the same, one time a couple of guys from *Ejidos Morelos* came down to *Naci* to trespass in the *Nogalera*. That's where our *río* begins, by the *La Nogalera*, the giant orchard of pecan trees.

All the springs that feed our *río* are there. And at our New Year (usually in February) we have some of our dances and ceremonials over by *La Nogalera*. It's like a sacred place. It's where our *río* is born, and nobody but Kickapoo Juice is supposed to be around there. That's our land. I can take you there, if I want to. But a stranger just can't go in there by himself. It's taking a risk.

The *río* comes out of the ground right there. But these guys from *Ejidos Morelos* (that nobody even knew) just came sneaking into our *Nogalera* all on their own, without *permiso*. Nobody invited them. They came with some Mexican Government people. They thought they were being tricky coming down there in the *canícula* when most of these Kickapoo peoples were working up north in the fields by Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. They thought every Kickapoo was gone far away.

These people from the Mexican Government were the ones who know how to build dams and control *nepi* and lay down big pipelines. But I'd been down in the *Nogalera* fishing around all day with my bow and

arrows. (Yes, fishing means I shoot the biggest fishes right through the water with my bow and arrow.) And I had been fishing all day and I had a big fancy string of good fish to take home for a special meal. So these *Mexicanos* came to the *Nogalera* when I was just done fishing, and of course I seen them coming from far away so I hid behind some bushes and watched to see what they were up to.

By watching and listening to their conversations I found out they were inspecting the *Nogalera* to see how much water comes out of it. I learned they had a plan to lay some big pipes all the way from *La Nogalera* to those *Mexicano* co-op farmers who live in *Ejidos Morelos*. But not a single drop for us, *hombre*! Son of a bitch! So, when I was sure they meant to take our *nepi* away from us, I came out from my hiding place and I approached them.

"Hey, you guys," I said. "You better watch out!"

I told them they better get out of there quick because those wild *Indios* that lived around there were hiding out close by in the *chaparrito prieto* with bows and arrows aimed directly at their heads.

"I'm doing you a big favor," I said. "I am giving you this warning. I know these *Indio* peoples around here pretty good. So, let me tell you, if it wasn't for me giving you this warning then you'd already be stuck with arrows!"

Well, they kind of looked at me like I was real crazy. And I kind of looked back at them like maybe I was, but, just the same, maybe their time was running out. Who knows? Because after all their sneaking

around I was still holding my bow and arrow. (And my string of fancy fish was hidden in the bushes so they had no idea I was just out there fishing in my old Kickapoo way.) And just then, *hombre*, over there hidden behind some *pe-can-a-qui,* like pecan trees, some animal starts thrashing around. I don't know what it was because we couldn't see it, but it made some kind of scary noise. It was probably just a *cócono*, you know, a wild turkey, or maybe in their minds it was the wild *na-na-tuna-naka sa-sa-ke*, which means like the great-multiplier-of-sacred-snakes-that-feed-especially-on-*Mexicanos*-from the-government. But whatever it was, it made those guys believe me. They thought those wild *Indios* around there might be ready to jump them, so they beat it, and they never came back.

So far. *Sí,* so far, they have never come back.

So, like I say, ninety-nine-point-nine percent of the People, of my People, if you ask them, will tell you the *río* belongs to the Mexican Government. But the *río* is *Nacimiento*. Only after *Nacimiento* does the *río* become *La Sabina*. Our *nepi* comes from the ground of *La Nogalera*. This ground is mine. This *nepi* is mine. It's Kickapoo Nation.

Yeah, I fooled those Mexican Government guys and those guys from *Ejidos Morelos*. There was no wild *Indios* hiding out there around the *chaparrito prieto*. All the Kickapoo peoples were up north, working hard, *hombre*, topping onions, picking fruit, melting under the hard pounding sun on those high plains ranches and farms. Just a few of us remain here in *Naci* in the summertime. We remain here and we protect our sacred

place from Colonel Ranald Mackenzie and all his children's children. No dams. No pipelines. This is our *río*. Our river, *hombre*. It stays like it is. Wild, *señor*. *Na-ná-he!*

So wild, it comes from the wilderness and must stay with the wilderness. After *Nacimiento*, then it must be something else. But here the *río* is mine. See? Drink it, *hombre*. Like me. This is *Nacimiento*. But hey, *Señorini*, now who is that guy over there? See him, washing his hair? You recognize that guy? *Sí*, it's *Pes-ki-tu-ma*. You got it, *hombre*. Go over and say hello to him. He remembers you. He's always asking about you.

***Peskituma*'s "*Aqui no más*"**

("I'm here, but that's all")

You know me, don't you? I'm *Peskituma*. I am one of the uncles of *Ekoneskaka*. Yeah, I just came back from Oklahoma. I got burned real bad up there. Now I'm *pinto* all over. I lost my eyesight too. There was a fire in a traditional Kickapoo home. I was in there alone. I threw water on the fire, but it was a gasoline fire and I should not have doused it with water. Because it just flashed up and burned my eyes. Then the roof fell in on me and burned my hair. I was completely bald. But some hair has grown back at least, so I wash what little I have. Right here in the river.

How did the fire start? Someone got mad at me. Some jealous man. You see, I've been all over this country. Back in '48 and '49 I worked sixteen hour shifts on the railroad. Seven o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. And I worked in the orange groves in California too. All over. And I've lived alone mostly, and so I learned to cook real good. The women liked my cooking. They loved to come and visit me and eat my cooking. So, this is exactly what happened. Some jealous husband burned me up because his wife was coming around to eat my food.

I lost my sight. It was curious. When they brought me to the hospital I could still see. My vision was perfect. But then when the doctors started wrapping me up and moving my skin from place to place I lost my vision. I went pure blind. But, by and by, I have learned to get around. I came back to *Nacimiento*. I

was born here. I wash each day in the river to bring my sight back. I can see about a meter now. It's this *río* I came to wash in, and it's helping me.

Mechi-Mi-Tota (Jim Salvator)

I know there's a right thing to do. It shines out at me like a star on black paper. A lot of other stars might be shining out too. But my star shines out clear. Only at me, Salvator, and for once I fucking knew it.

Uncle Walter and me were traveling through south Texas country in the middle of a silent night, trying our best to make the rendezvous at old Dove Creek for the big celebration. Yeah, we were celebrating and commemorating when the Kickapoos whipped the Texans up at Dove Creek, way back in 1865. *Sí, Señorini!* Fuck the Alamo. But "Remember Dove Creek!"

So, from *Nacimiento* to Eagle Pass, on the windy road to Dove Creek, we'd been traveling for more than seven hours, just one stinking breakdown after another. The car we stole was finally beat. It started smoking. Then it burst wide open. The flames were leaping fuckwise. But Uncle Walter stayed in command. He drove straight into the ditch, trying to smother the fire from the burning motor. Our front end churned up dirt, but we kept our wits and rolled out the doors, even while the car was still moving. Then we started running like hell. A few seconds later the gas tank blew, heaven-wise, mushroom style, and the car burned nice as shit.

All thanks to Uncle Walter we were okay. So, we just stopped running and started walking. We loved to walk. Just two pesky *hombres*, that was us, "heading for another joint," just like the song says.

But also it was the middle of the night on a country road in south fucking Texas. And a country road in fucking south Texas is darker than shit. So, except for the little bit of starlight and the car in flames behind us, we was pretty near invisible. Damn lucky. Nobody seen us.

"That was *real* close," says my good Uncle Walter. "Did we lose anything?"

"Yeah, I fucking think so," I says.

"So, we lost all our stuff?"

"Yeah, fuck yeah, like we lost fucking everything."

It was fuckin lucky, though. Still hours before first light. We could make it to a bigger place and maybe catch a ride, or even board the fucking Greyhound Bus to old San Angelo. Then there'd be no twenty questions with the *policía*.

But for now the car was still burning, calling fucking attention to itself. Maybe no one had noticed yet. No one noticed much, as usual, with so-called no-counts like us. Yeah, we come all the way from Eagle Pass in that stolen car without anyone giving a shit. Even so, I thought we were fucked, I mean really fucked, unless maybe Jesus intervened in our favor. So, to make things nice, I prayed.

Yeah, I did. But it made no fucking difference. I could tell. Because the *chota* (that's *Mexicano* for 'cop') found us pretty quick anyways. Just as it got lighter in that old borderland sky.

Yeah man, a Texas state patrol car pulled up beside Uncle Walter, who was maybe twenty yards in front of me, moseying along the shoulder without a care in the world. So, when I seen the *chota* stop, I took my chance and started running across the field in the other direction like a decoy duck. The field was open and dry and I was running full blast, man, so the cop yelled and jumped out of his car and started running after me, just like I planned. Then Uncle Walter took his cue and started running off in the opposite direction, so the cop pulled up short, grabbed his pistol and fired. Uncle Walter dove for the dirt and played like was hit. Meanwhiles, I keeps distracting the *chota*, running and zigzagging like a *sa-sa-ke*. (That's Kickapoo for 'snake'.) And I was hooting my brains out too. It was a good job all around.

To be sure, the Texas *chota* got real mad and he ran after me again. And he fired passionately, but each time he missed because he was running and yelling and firing at the same time, messing up his aim. So, I just kept pouring on the steam, churning with my chunky legs so he couldn't get a bead on me. What with all my zigging and zagging and hooting, he was chasing a human *ma-weh-ah*. (That's Kickapoo for 'coyote'.)

So, pretty soon I guess, he fucking ran out of gas. He stopped to change his clip. Then he was turning back to his car and huffing like Gerald Ford. Thanks be to God, we were getting the fuck away. But we also knew that very soon even more *chotas* would be on their way, so we had to move it. I jumped into

the roadside ditch and I followed it to where I thought Uncle Walter would be, if he was thinking like I was, meaning that now we had to do some very heavy shit. And sure enough, my good Uncle Walter *had* re-crossed the road and circled back in my direction in that very same fucking ditch, so we could meet up while still being hidden. Yes-sir-ee! There he was, my good Uncle Walter, crawling toward me in the roadside ditch, kind of laughing with his *Sus-ke-ne-thi* eyeballs. (*Sus-ke-ne-thi*, that's Kickapoo for deer buck.)

"I guess we in some fine fuckin trouble now," I whispers.

"I guess so," says Uncle Walter.

"What we fucking going to do?"

"Just hide out."

"Fuck! Where?"

"Right here. Look for some shade."

"There ain't no fuckin shade here," I retorts, angry as a red ass.

"Well, just crawl under a bush."

So, I did. I crawled under the nearest fucking bush by the roadside ditch. There *was* a little shade. And I kept my watch-eye peeled, so I couldn't never rest much. My fears were keeping me on high alert for the *chota* shit.

"Just rest easy," says Uncle Walter.

"They're going to fuck with us," I says.

"Yeah."

"So," I says, "Come on Uncle Walter, let us fucking pray!"

True, I was trying out my best sarcasmic tones on Uncle Walter since once-upon-a-time he actually had been some kind of Christian preacher. But that was all in the motherfucking past, thank God, and now Uncle Walter was all right again. He didn't preach or plan. He just never figured the *chotas* would be able to surround us, or even get the drop on us before we could start running again. I wasn't so fucking sure.

Yeah, no plan, just react. Just like he rolled that burning car into the ditch. He was an agile Kickapoo gentleman, a true-to-God Kickapoo warrior. So, somehow, everything worked out for him as if he *had* fucking planned it, when actually he did no such fucking thing.

That was exactly how the Kickapoos defeated the Texans at Dove Creek in 1865. They had no plan to attack the Texans. They were trying to avoid them. The Kickapoos were traveling with their women and children, minding their own damn business, migrating from south Kansas to *Nacimiento*, or thereabouts around *Nueva Rosita*. The Texas Confederates ambushed them with their Horse Cavalry. So, the Kickapoos (deftly as shit) wrung them out to dry, killing one hundred fucking Texas dolts. Every single one of them.

But, now, the chick-a-dee had come home to roost (as they say) right on top of us, because I looked up to see the same fucking *chota* we had just out-maneuvered, standing there with his *pistola* cocked and pointed directly at Uncle Walter's big fat belt silver buckle. Fucking figures.

We could hardly run now. So, I whipped the rock I was hiding in my hand and it smacked the cop in the side of his face. Blood shot out from his eyeball and he fired wide at Uncle Walter, missing by a sheer country mile. Damn lucky again. So, I jumped up and put a chokehold on the cop, and I choked him silly until he passed clean cold out.

"I knew it," says Uncle Walter.

"Shit. What?"

"I knew you'd get him."

"I didn't even know what the fuck I was doing."

“I saw it."

"I didn't even fucking think."

“No reason to.”

Then Uncle Walter surprised me. He kind of made a plan. Just when I thought he'd never plan again he comes up with a doozy. He said we were going to strip the *chota* down to his underwear and take his uniform. The *chota* was about my size, and Uncle Walter said I would be the cop, and he would be the Indian, and then we could drive away safe in the *chota's* car until we could figure out something else to do. Yeah.

“Yeah,” says Uncle Walter, “you gonna be the *chota*.”

"But why don't you be the fucking cop?" I says.

"No," he says. "I'm too heavy-set. This cop is medium build, like you. You got to be the *chota*."

So, shit, Uncle Walter rode in the backseat with undeniable dignity, like a Kickapoo warrior prisoner (if there ever could be such a thing). And, meanwhiles,

I keep the cop radio going in the front seat so as to check for what I know is going to happen anyways. More fucking *chotas* on the way. We had no fucking chance.

But, let's face it, when you hang with the Kickapoos a lot of miraculous shit goes down. So, since we were in old Kickapoo country, we fucking perchance came upon a small *rancho* that was isolated in a giant green grove of cottonwoods. (True, these old *ranchos* appear all over south Texas, and we came upon this one about twenty minutes after we'd started out. Still, it was lucky as shit, if not pure fucking miraculous, to find such a keen hideout so fast.) The giant cottonwoods leafed out like green fucking umbrellas designed for dinos, so we had some real decent cover. And there was no vehicles around we could see except some old rancho tractors and one faded pickup on blocks, tires nowhere to be seen, as is customary in such straits.

Okay, let's face it. I admit it. I did not look like a fucking cop up close. I looked more like a pissant *bandito*. And Uncle Walter actually was a Kickapoo warrior, so he didn't have to pretend. So, if you care to stretch God's truth a lot, maybe we *both* looked *maybe* like we *could* have been Kickapoos. Me a *Mexicano Indio* renegade with a teeny-weeny drop of Kickapoo Indian blood. And Uncle Walter was FBI (Full-Blood-Indian): 100% Kickapoo Juice. (For my part, at least I'd won me a Kickapoo name: *Mechimitota*. But I wasn't expecting to fool anyone about being a cop nor a Kickapoo neither.)

So, I pulled the *chota's* car right into a big stable barn on the rancho because the door was wide fucking open. It was pitch dark inside compared to the sun that was blasting and blistering outside. I couldn't see fucking anything until my eyes adjusted. I barely parked my vehicle and shut off the engine. I put down the window and took a nice fucking lung full of breath. But I coughed up a chunk of something and hocked it out. It never hit the ground. Fuck me.

Yes-sir-ee, *Señorini*, a double barrel shotgun pressed into the side of my fucking head and this kid's husky voice says, "You ain't no cop."

"Hmm," I says, "no shit."

"You're an Indian maybe."

"Look here, you little fuckin piece of shit," I most viciously retorts at his ass.

"Don't you 'look here' me, mister, you shitty spic. You're part Indian maybe, probably part spic too."

But in the back seat I hear my good Uncle Walter clearing his leathery throat.

"A-hem," he says, "now wait a sec, sonny. Even if that's true, you don't want to fire that shotgun. Heck, you're just a kid. You ought not to be killing people, especially us Indians."

"Oh yeah," says the kid. "Look over there."

My eyes were adjusting pretty good to the darkness now so I could see where the kid was motioning with his fucking *cabeza*. I seen he was pointing at five severed heads. Five heads chopped off and mounted on horse stalls!

"Those are Kickapoo heads," says the kid. "And I shot each one in the guts. Only reason I ain't shot you yet is because I don't want to mess up my collectibles."

Jesus Christ, I'm thinking, who the fuck uses a word like 'collectibles' in a case like this? But then I hear my good Uncle Walter again, this time trying to blow out the fire, so to speak.

"Wait a sec, sonny," says Uncle Walter. "I don't think those are *real* Kickapoo heads you've got there." (But we knew who they were. They *were* the heads of five Kickapoo warriors who were already supposed to be hiding out at Dove Creek, waiting for us, but they'd never made it. Instead, they must of run into this fucking kid with his fucking big-ass shotgun.)

"Those are *true* Kickapoo heads," says the kid, a little doubtfully maybe. "No doubt about it."

"Not *truly*," says good Uncle Walter. "You have been duped, young man. Those are not even real Indians. Those are Mexican Juice."

"What?" says the kid.

"Well," says my good Uncle Walter. "We *are* Kickapoo Juice. You are right about that. And we know all the Kickapoos around here. In fact, right now we are heading up to Dove Creek to meet a whole bunch of other Kickapoos."

The kid doesn't give a damn.

"Get out of the car, Kickapoo," he says to me. "You get out too, old man" he says to Uncle Walter, mean as he can make it sound.

"Sure thing," says Uncle Walter. "But you take a look at my head, and you compare it to those Mexican

heads. See the difference? Mexican heads are round in the back. But we Kickapoos have flatter heads in the back from our cradleboards. See? Look, just lift up my hair. I'll show you. Look at the back of *my* head."

And Uncle Walter turns so the kid can see the back of his head, and the kid's eyes move up for a split second so I quick slap the gun barrel and the shot goes screaming wide. Uncle Walter, to be sure, was faster than shit. He had the kid face down in the dirt in a Russian fandango.

It didn't matter, though. Sad to say. At least four more fuckin kids come out from the horse stalls and step around us in a circle. They all had their own big-ass shotguns leveled right the fuck at us.

“Don’t shoot them," says a mewling kind of voice (if I ever fuckin heard one). “Not yet.”

That's when we found out where we had so luckily landed. We had by sheer fucking accident turned into a rancho operated by a fucking Jesuit priest who ran it like a fucking summer camp for his motherfucking altar boys. No shit. Those gun-bearing kids were fucking campers. And this Jesuit, we knew him all too well. He was fucking Reverend Father Michel Guignas, known to us as a *friend* of the Kickapoo Indians. Some friend. A real fucking pal. I mean, as far as I could fucking deduce, he had just lured a bunch of Kickapoos onto his ranch, pretending he could help them, and then somehow cut them down. He must have known what we were planning up at Dove Creek. He had his ways of finding out every fucking thing, and using it hard against us.

"Why, Uncle Walter, is that you?" says fucking Father Guignas, pivoting in his long black gown. “We have a little problem. A Texas state trooper has been attacked near here, and the police are searching everywhere for two Indian suspects, one heavy-set and one medium build, wearing a trooper’s uniform. What’s your partner's name, anyway?"

"Fucking Salvator," I says.

“I've never heard of any Kickapoos with that name,” says Guignas. “Salvador sounds like it could be a bastardized Ute name, perhaps. But Salvator? That sounds *Neopolitiano Rigioliano*, especially when you add the ‘fucking’ part to it.”

That was Father Guignas, all right, ever so clever and pleased with himself about it.

“But now we don't have time for name games, do we?” he mewls again. “Boys, let's get these two fine ‘Kickapoos’ into the silo. Bury them under the trash.”

So, the altar boys pushed us forward with their long-barreled guns, which they fucking cocked for good fucking measure. Maybe in a few seconds the backup *chotas* would be cruising into the rancho, looking around for us. And I just wondered how (unless they were fucking blind) they could miss those five severed heads mounted on the stalls in the stable. But I guess they never came, or, if they did, Father Guignas deceived them with ease, smart-ass that he was.

Joyeux Joyeux mois de mai! Reverend Father Michel Guignas, Society of Jesus, hereby personally

records that in the Year of Our Lord, 1712, in the merry month of May, on the 17th day of that merry month, I witnessed un beau parade. Commandant Dubuisson's Détachements and Mercenaires had captured a group of Indiens d'Amerique Kickapoo on the Miami River, slew the warriors, and carried off their heads to Detroit, where they were paraded before the garnison.

Wherefore, I hereby swear & affirm before the one God: « I shall never forget that day, in the merry month of May, the flowers all in bloom. The sky at sunset too, oh red as the Rose of Our Lord, and the Kickapoo heads were paraded before us, glaring in the soft evening light, silhouetted by our merry campfires and our sumptuous joyful feasts. » Joyeux Joyeux mois de mai!

What the fuck was that? Some French-fried newsreel just rolling through my fucking cerebellum? But, before I could fucking contemplate what the fuck was going on, the gun-slinging altar boys pushed us into a little room that led up to the silo door. We had to crawl up a few steps, and then they pushed us inside and locked the steel trap door behind us. The top of the silo was open, and it was like 60 feet up to the blue sky of fuck-filled Texas. Then we heard an engine start up. It was some kind of shit-spreader machine. It started shooting trash over sixty feet high. And they were aiming it over the silo wall, so it was falling down straight on top of us, covering us with their crap. We kept out of the way as best we could, but the trash kept flopping down all around us. We had to keep

climbing to keep from getting buried. Crap and shit was flying every which-a-way.

But the altar boys had been forced to move a little too fast, and they were careless as fuck-faced boys so often are. So, they didn't take time to really search my good Uncle Walter before they locked the trap door. I knew Uncle Walter had that one cop's gun on him. The one we had left face down in the ditch in his drawers. Shit, I was pretty sure Uncle Walter had confiscated his *chota pistola*. Lucky for us.

And, lucky for us, we saw no more of Reverend Father Guignas that fine fucking day. By night time, the shit spreader was shut off or ran out gas. We were about half buried in crap, stuck on a fucking heap 25 feet high, at least, and 16 fucking feet wide. It was like having a skunk glued to your face, but worse. We'd been climbing and crawling all day through their shit. The heat had doubled-up too, but now, thank God, it was finally starting to cool off again with fucking Texas twilight passing into fucking Texas darkness. We crawled to the topmost layer and got some fresh air. Father Guignas and his ever-loving altar boys must have figured we were buried alive under their crap.

"You know about Father Guignas?" says Uncle Walter.

"Not much. I heard of him, I guess. Nothing much fucking good in my book."

"You're right. He is the Immortal Jesuit. Black Gown. The one and only Father Michel Guignas, The Immortal Priest."

"Yeah? Immortal, huh? Fuckin-A," I says, warming up my sarcasmic undertones to fit the solemn occasion. (I wasn't going to indulge no magical thinking.)

"Oh yeah," says Uncle Walter. "He was our missionary. Just a few hundred years before you were born. He come all the way to *Nacimiento* to spread his Jesuit gospel."

"So, that's why he wants to fucking kill us? Because we still hate the fucking missionaries?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah?" I says. "That fucking makes a lot of sense. You shall not fucking kill, right? That's what their fucking Good Book says."

"No *hombre*, this Guignas is a Jesuit psycho," says my good Uncle Walter, throwing me into spasm.

"Oh, really?" I finally says, "Psycho, you say? I *doubt* it. You saw those fucking severed heads, didn't you? That could *never* be the work of a psycho. Correct me if I am fucking wrong, okay?"

"Yeah, okay, I saw them heads the same as you," says my good Uncle Walter. "And I know who they were too."

But it made me think. Those five Kickapoo warriors weren't traveling alone, so where were our women and children, and where were our old people? Where did Guignas keep them? I was thinking that's maybe why he killed our Kickapoo warriors. Like maybe he killed them to cut off their heads for his fucking pleasure dome. But then I says to myself, the Kickapoo women and children have to be here

someplace, locked up some-fucking-place. He must have made them fucking prisoners, or slaves even. Or he killed them. Cut off their heads too. Probably. Shit.

So, that being my sorry scenario, I looked up through the top of the silo at the fucking nighttime sky. Clouds maybe. All fucking black like the long black gown of the Jesuit priest. Then it got weirder. Because a Kickapoo newsreel starts rolling in my brain.

This is Ma-che-man-et speaking, an elder spirit, standing by the fire along with the five slain Kickapoo warriors, and now I begin to sing.

We must heal our five slain warriors. They are spirits now, laughing by the fire. The spirits say we must find their bodies and put their heads back on, or their heads might get lost or mixed up by people who don't know them.

The spirits say if we would do just that one little thing for them (just restore the correct heads to the correct bodies) then they will be forever grateful to us.

My songs are bird language. "We all are going to meet. At old fork. Of Dove Creek. And you and Walter too. Must bring the bodies, heads, and teeth!"

And now all five warriors you may see are laughing like crazy ghosts because the sound of my song tickles them like a feather, and it is beautiful to see their hope for you.

Yes, I am Ma-che-man-et. I sing of long ago, before the time of Dove Creek, when General Earl Van Dorn was the Confederate Commander in Old Texas. Van Dorn recognized the great fighting spirit of our

Kickapoo warriors, and so he sent his General Albert Pike to recruit our Me-thu-de-ne-nia warriors to fight by his side in the American Civil War.

So, old Pike brought us Kickapoo warriors many fine hats and saddles and trousers, copper kettles, guns and ammunition. Coffee, sugar and tobacco too. And Pike pressured us Kickapoos to 'touch the pen' and sign a treaty with the Texas Confederate State.

We, the Me-thu-de-ne-nia, were caught between the Confederates and the Union, not understanding what all the Long Knives were fighting about. But one thing was crystal clear: The Texans were Confederates. Once we Kickapoos figured that out, then we better understood our place in the fight. Our choice of allies was made clear. We Kickapoo warriors declared we would join any side but that on which the Texans fought.

Yeah, I must have been restlessly eyeballing the borderland sky, studying my fucking mental newsreel. But I sure felt something smack me on the head. So I grabbed it. It was the end of a fucking rope.

"You think a little bird dropped that rope?" says my good Uncle Walter. "No," he says, "it was no bird. It was our Kickapoo women."

Then Uncle Walter gives me his most sagacious fucking look.

He says, "I figured they was here. So, I used bird language to contact them. I was singing to them: '*Wiskana*, *Wis-kan-a, shoot me your lassoes!*' I was singing in my bird language. And *Wiskana* was singing back to me."

Uncle Walter, heavyset as he was, could scale a fucking rope up the inside of that silo faster than fucking yours-truly. But then I was still wondering, what about the singsong stuff Uncle Walter was mumbling about? What about old *Ma-che-man-et's* singing newsreel too? Then I got to really fucking wondering. What about all the birds and animals? Like about how they all talk to one another? Most people will tell you that humans are the fucking smartest because we talk to one another. But animals fucking talk too. Truth is, they may be fucking smarter than us. Probably so. Way more evolved.

I mean, they don't need cars. They don't need no clothes. They don't suck and burn oil like it was Christmas, which they don't need neither.

Well, sure enough, the Kickapoo women had built their *wikiups* back behind the silo, back about three hundred fucking feet, and so we scaled down the outside of the silo wall and got to the ground in a jiffy. We were fucking quiet too, and so we slid into one of those Kickapoo summertime *wikiups* (which the women had erected by themselves on their very first day at the *rancho*). And Guignas and the altar boys were on guard too, of course, but it was easy to get around them. The shit-fuckers. They were just fucking Christians, after all. So, once we got safe inside the *wikiup*, *Wiskana* spoke up truly.

"Uncle Walter," she says, "you look a little pale. Have you eaten today?"

Uncle Walter had never looked better, except for all the shit and garbage stains on him. Just the same, *Wiskana* built a fire and cooked for us both. She gave us scrambled eggs and *chile* beans and *tortillas* and *café*, and we ate very quietly like old wise *ratones.*

Finally, *Wiskana* spoke up truly again.

"Are you still going to Dove Creek?"

"Why yes, if we can make it," says my good Uncle Walter, "but how did our warriors get killed?"

"It was two nights ago," she answered, like she couldn't wait no minute more to tell us.

"The warriors were still alive," she says, and then the tears start boiling down her face.

"You know my sister," she says, "my sister was married to Joe Okemah. I came here with her and her family, and my niece, Bee. We all remembered when Father Guignas came to *Nacimiento*. He told us we could always stay at his Texas *ranchito*."

"Yes," says Uncle Walter, "I remember."

And *Wiskana* looks down and rubs her foot in the dirt. Then she says, "We believed Guignas would hide us when we were going to Dove Creek. But then he left *Nacimiento* so sudden. Nobody said why. So, I asked around about him, and finally old *Ouis-kou-ba* said he was still our friend. He said that Father Guignas would help get us to Dove Creek. So, we came. We trusted Father Guignas."

You trusted that fucking sucker? It was all I could think of, but I didn't say it.

"By and by, Guignas fed us a meal," says *Wiskana*, "and the warriors ate first, according to

tradition. But then all five got sick. They fell down in the dirt, holding their stomachs, yelling for help. But before we could heal them, one of the altar boys (you know, that one with the husky voice) he started shooting them while they were down sick on the ground. He shouted he could get their sickness cured if he shot each one in the stomach. And so he did. With his shotgun."

"We saw their heads," says Uncle Walter.

I was pretty surprised to hear my good Uncle Walter mention the desecration of our warriors, but *Wiskana* seemed to know.

"Yes," says *Wiskana*. "The altar boys chopped off their heads and paraded around with them like trophies. Then they took all our Kickapoo boys away too. Now we live here alone, just women and girls."

"And the old people," says Uncle Walter, "where did they go?"

"I don't know," says *Wiskana*, "but my niece, Bee, she says she saw a lot of birds flying in the direction of Dove Creek. It could have been them. They left all their clothes and possessions and just disappeared."

Outside we could hear the noises of the ever-loving altar boys. They were bored and tired, arguing about who was the best shot, and who would be first to dig our bodies out of the crap-filled silo, and who would get the esteemed privilege of lopping off our poor old heads, and who would parade around with them at night with torches, and who would

finally mount them on empty stalls, hung there right beside the other warriors who had gone so soon before us.

I said out loud, “It would be good thinking to get the fuck out of here right now before those fucking altar boys find us the fuck out.”

But Uncle Walter and *Wiskana* had already gone off together. I could hear them whispering in the darkness.

"First things first," says *Wiskana*. "You two warriors will need a strategy. I say you can dress up like old women. Like I told you, we still have the clothes of our old people. Now, if you disguise yourselves properly, then when those altar boys come peeking into our *wikiups* they won't know who you are."

From my fucking point of view, I was already wearing a cop’s uniform. I would have been very glad to get out of it, but wearing old women's clothes didn't seem to fit the bill neither, you know?

Still, we did it. Then *Wiskana* burned the cop’s clothes, and Uncle Walter's old clothes got burned too, as they smelled pretty *ma-weh-ah.* (Yeah, *ma-weh-ah*, that’s Kickapoo for ‘coyote’.) *Wiskana* also hid the *chota pistola* (which Uncle Walter did in fact possess) deep inside her buckskin bag. Then I looked over to see Bee. She was already looking at me.

"Does your blouse fit all right?" she says.

"Hmmm," I says. "It feels fucking tight."

“OK," she says, "and what about your skirt?"

"Hmm," I says. “the fucking thing.”

"Here," she says, adjusting the skirt.

That was the best fucking part of the whole fandango with Uncle Walter. I mean Bee had her way that kind of took you off into another place which you had been wanting to go to but maybe didn't even know really existed for sure. I suppose she was desperate and feeling shocked because at one moment the five Kickapoo warriors had been with her, traveling to Dove Creek, but then the next minute (it must have seemed) they had been brutally killed and beheaded like in some kind of Guignas horror movie. Still, it was lucky she'd never seen the stalls in the stable with the warriors' heads hanging right on them like trophies. Me and Uncle Walter didn't mention that part of the desecration. We were just kind of fucking numb half the time anyway. How else could we survive? And I suppose Bee had been numbed out too. Because she was just reaching out to me for some kind of comfort, any kind of comfort. I don't know. I suppose she wanted to give comfort too. We were thrown together in this awful fucking nightmare, just suffering together, and I wasn't going to push her away neither.

Just the same, we eventually untangled ourselves, except for our eyeballs, and sooner than we wanted we got down to the business we couldn't avoid, no matter what. So, Bee helped me finish up my masquerade as an old Kickapoo woman. I was pitiful looking. But, we kept on our serious faces because it was starting to get light outside and the altar boys had begun searching for us like we were tiny little bugs and they were fucking banty roosters.

By this time, they had pitchforked through all the trash and hauled most of it all the way out of the silo in what seemed like record-breaking time. They were pissed off not to find us and they were ready to kill us if they could find us. They started searching the *wikiup*s one by one, and being mean as boys can be, slapping the women and girls, and cussing them out. It got pretty fucking rough, but we had to wait.

Then my patience paid off.

"Who's *that* old witch?" says one of the altar boys, pointing a shotgun at me. Bee just looked at him, so he smacked her with the gun barrel and she fell down quiet as a stone. I didn't know if she was fucking knocked out or what.

"Who are *you*, old witch?" screamed the altar boy at me. I could feel him pointing the gun my way. I didn't turn around to face him exactly. But I did barely move, rotating ever so slowly like a crippled-up old person does, and so it looked like it was fucking hard for me to move at all. But the boy was in a big hurry too. So, he took another step closer and jabbed me with the barrel and I fucking exploded, belting his face clean off. Blood shot out of his nose and his neck snapped like a teeny-weeny banty rooster neck. Little fuckin asshole.

So, at least, I had me a nice new shotgun. I stepped toward the *wikiup* door, but right away I was blinded by a shotgun blast smack in front of my face. I hit the dirt. Another blast tore a hole in the side of the *wikiup*, and then I seen Uncle Walter toss a boy out

backwards through the fucking wall. By then, all the fucking altar boys were converging on us. So I got up on one knee and fired at them. I got one in the upper leg and he howled like a motherfucker. Then all those little fuckers turned and started running for their lives to the Jesuit *rancho* house, leaving the one I'd shot far behind, screaming for some Christian charity. My fuckin ass.

And, of course, just like the Christ himself, there was fucking Father Guignas, standing right there in the doorway of the fucking *rancho*, smiling weird as shit. And then he came rushing out to meet his frightened altar boys. His black gown was spreading out as he circled them in his crooked arms, big as dead tree branches. And it was very fucking interesting to watch his black flowing robe. It seemed like fucking Guignas had giant black moth wings, or like he was some giant sting ray covering up his frightened little sting ray babies.

But, the next second, Guignas fell like a shit ton. He slammed to the ground and then he was skidding along on his fucking back. His robe came up around his head and he fishtailed, smacking right against a giant cottonwood tree. The altar boys swarmed to help him. Too fucking late.

Fuck him. Just couldn't help but think it.

Next thing I know, old Uncle Walter skids up in front of the bunkhouse in a white fucking school bus. When the dust settled, I could clearly read the black lettering on the side of the bus. *Catholic Home for Boys, Reverend Father Michel Guignas, Society of Jesus*. (And

then it gave the phone number and address, which I guess pertained to this little fucking *ranchito* where we found ourselves that day.)

I guess so. But then the Kickapoo newsreel started up again, whirring in my poor head like an old-time projector.

Ma-che-man-et is my name, and this is my song. I sent a courier to the Kickapoos camped out in south-west Kansas. These were the Kickapoos under the leadership of Pa-pe-quah, mostly, but also Pe-can and No-ko-what had large groups living there too. These Kickapoos were raiders for the Union Army contractors, and raiding the Texans was their sacred duty (and their most serious pastime). They would likely bring a thousand head of cattle and horses stolen from Texans on any given day, and the Union needed every single head. So, the Kickapoos amassed quite a bit of loot for the Union Army by 1865.

I myself, Ma-che-man-et, also had a big run-in with Confederate Texans while I was migrating to Mexico three years before Dove Creek, like in 1862. The Texans attacked me on the Little Concho River. They tried to take my giant horse herd. And sixteen Texans were shot from their saddles, so the Confederate battalion gave up quick, running for reinforcements. They never did catch me, though. I crossed the Rio Grande at the north end of the Sierra del Carmin Range, and I made it to Nacimiento, free as a kicking bird.

The courier I sent to Pa-pe-quah and the others in 1865 invited all the Kickapoos to join me down in

Nacimiento. And I, Ma-che-man-et, relate all this, and many other fine things, as we stand by the fire. And I remind you to care for the slain warriors and to guard their bodies and their severed heads too, so that they can celebrate soon in the Kickapoo country, and also so we can be sure that only the Immortal Guignas might finally perish at last.

Society of Jesus? Is that what fucking Guignas pretended to be? I kept reading and re-reading the lettering on the side of the bus. I didn't think Jesus would join that Society. But, what the hell, the sight of Uncle Walter driving dressed-up like an old woman made me laugh, but I couldn't quite unlock my damn jaws until I'd made sure that *Ma-che-man-et* had stopped singing in my brain. His words were burning. But, finally, my mind came back to me. Here I was again. Back in old Kickapoo country. I was just part of it. I mean, somehow, Uncle Walter had lassoed fucking Guignas and then tied him to the school bus when he was too busy hugging his altar boys. Guignas had never even noticed Uncle Walter in all the hubbub. And Uncle Walter's lasso must have been hidden by the Jesuit's long black robe. Because that fucking robe was miraculously huge, and so black, like blacker and bigger than a fucking anvil thunderhead. That explains what happened, I guess. Then, once Uncle Walter got Guignas latched tight by the fucking ankle, he fucking dashed back to the school bus and fucking cranked up the engine and threw that fucker into fucking gear, dragging fucking Guignas at high speed until the priest

fucking fishtailed and smacked into the fucking tree trunk. Likely died right there on the spot, spilling his brains for all of us to see, just as *Ma-che-man-et* had requested. To me, it was a beautiful thing.

So, I got this all figured out in my mind and then my jaw started to loosen up a bit, and just as I started to laugh out loud I could hear once again old *Ma-che-man-et* singing to me again. So, this time, giving in to my circumstances, I stepped closer to his fire.

The Me-thu-de-ne-nia of Pa-pe-quah, Pe-can and No-ko-what accepted my invitation to come down and settle in old Mexico. They started their migration in September of 1864. All combined, there were 700 Kickapoos on the move. I had sent my scouts to guide them. First, they went due west from south Kansas country. With so many people moving together they chose to go slowly, caring for the children and the old people, hunting buffalo, drying and putting up meat for the coming winter.

The Me-thu-de-ne-nia finally turned south into the Texas Panhandle in the autumn of 1864. The whole plan of our warriors was to evade the Confederate Texans. The scouts led them on a path that was not anywhere close to the Texas settlements, so they could arrive in Nacimiento before the heavy snow that freezes the Texans blood, making them so eternally hard-hearted.

And thus, each day before dawn, the Kickapoo scouts went out far into the rangeland, checking all around, to make sure the going was safe and smooth. By New Year's Day, 1865, the Me-thu-de-ne-nia came upon the South Concho River. The same area where three years before the battalion of Texas Confederates had tried to attack me and steal my herd of prize horses. The migrating Me-thu-de-ne-nia were now only a few days away from the Río Grande, where soon they could settle down safe from the Texans and be with us in happiness on the River Sabina. So far, their trip had been good. They had gathered many hides and dried meat. No problems. No sightings of Texans any place.

Yeah, like I'd never heard old *Ma-che-man-et* singing his dream songs so beautifully before. And there was no sightings of Texans here on the Guignas ranch neither. All good news. So far as I was concerned. So, I was thinking, wasn't I the only one who really knew how to drive that fucking Jesuit school bus? Back in *Nacimiento* it was me who drove the old school bus around the village, and I would regularly take people back and forth to *Muzquiz*, which was (and still is) the nearest town to *Nacimiento*. I made the route once a week, crossing the river at three different spots, depending on the flow. And I, *Mechi-mi-tota* (Jim Salvator) was truly known as the best fucking school bus driver the Kickapoos had ever had. Maybe. Maybe that's why they gave me my Kickapoo name, *Mechimitota*. Maybe. But I doubt it.

Anyway, maybe as a result of my bus driving reputation and uncontested skillset, I became the ideal candidate for driving Guignas' fucking white school bus. And Uncle Walter and *Wiskana* said I should be the fucking school bus driver. But, of course, it wasn't quite that easy.

"The other problem we face," says *Wiskana*, "is that Father Guignas always drove the school bus himself. It will look very suspicious if he's not the one who is driving now."

"Yeah," says my good Uncle Walter, "if some old woman is driving it will look fishy."

And Bee got a nice chuckle out of that, because me and Uncle Walter were still wearing old woman's clothes, even though by now I was supposed to be the fucking school bus driver.

"Well," I says, "fucking Guignas can't drive now, and that's for fucking sure. Because he looks to have no brain matter left inside his fucking skull."

"True enough," says Uncle Walter, "but you can wear his priestly outfit."

So, with deep fucking reluctance, I took on yet another formal disguise, and ended up in Father Guignas' black-fucking-motherfucking-gown.

And I don't care to speculate what Bee might have thought.

But then we had to load the bus, and bring the slain warriors and their heads back together in a respectful manner. And so, we loaded all of them up. We found the bodies of the warriors and matched them to the right heads. We wrapped up the five

warriors in clean blankets and covered them as best we could, using branches with green cottonwood leaves, and we tied everything tight with colorful strips of cloth torn from the discarded Kickapoo clothing the old people left around the *rancho* when they escaped. We were going to bring the warriors with us to Dove Creek. I was pretty sure that was exactly what old *Ma-che-man-et* wanted from me.

As for the altar boys and fucking Father Guignas, now stripped to his underwear and without his highly developed Jesuit brain matter, we led them or dragged them, as the case may have been, into the silo and covered them up (as maybe they would have liked to cover us up) with garbage and manure. I wanted to burn everything, the stable, the bunkhouse, the silo and the outbuildings, everything. So I found some fuel, but I never did the burning because it would have drawn too much attention. (No one cares about a little burning on a rancho. But a flaming bunkhouse and a stable and silo might have brought too much attention. So, I let it go. Yeah, I just let it go.)

We gathered up all the Kickapoos left to us then, the women, the girls. And the girls had found the little Kickapoo boys, trapped by fucking Guignas under his shit-ass bunkhouse. By noon, we had boarded everyone up, figuring those shit-eating altar boys would find their way out of the silo and get fucking re-oriented on the double, but by then we'd be long gone. And, sure enough, by late afternoon we were soaring out on the road. And the road was rolling by.

Sure, I was wearing the fucking Jesuit's black gown and driving the Jesuit's fucking white school bus. I guess by then I had become some kind of weird disguise artist. Professional in all ways, you know? And Bee was riding shotgun, keeping her eyes peeled. We were all headed to Dove Creek. And almost every passenger was dozing, or staring wide-eyed into the countryside, sleeping with their eyes open. As a bus driver, you get used to that.

For my part, I was fully awake. Maybe. I mean I could hear the rubber contacting the smooth grey surface of the road. And maybe the spinning tires had perchance lulled me into a motherfucking trance.

Then *Ma-che-man-et* was singing in my brain again. He had recommenced, so I did too, come what may.

Pa-pe-quah and the other chiefs, No-ko-what and Pe-can, checked with the scouts. The coast was clear, but the ponies needed a rest. And dark storm clouds were coming on. It looked like cold rain and snow would catch those traveling Kickapoos before they could arrive at our new home in Nacimiento.

So, the chiefs picked a good camp for those 700 travelers in a flat area that was divided by Dove Creek, which was a tributary of the South Concho River. And the Kickapoo campsite was perfect because there was a high bluff on the side where the storm was brewing.

The Me-thu-de-ne-nia put up lodges and the women and children gathered plenty of firewood. The fires got going and they were all staying warm inside

their lodges when the big storm moved in that night, dumping wet snow all over them.

Cold wind was blowing too, but the chiefs were happy because the Me-thu-de-ne-nia were all snug and safe. And so there was no need to send out scouts into those dangerous conditions. Even the Texans would not come out in weather like this. But little did the chiefs know that just a few days earlier a scurvy troop of Confederate Texans, under command of Captain Gillentine, were on the prowl, and they had crossed the trail left by the Me-thu-de-nia. These Texans followed the wide trail until they came to a water hole where the Me-thu-de-ne-nia had recently camped. And on the edge of the camp the Texans found a fresh Kickapoo grave.

"Let's dig it up!" said one of the Texans, a vulture in his saddle.

"Better not," said another trooper. His name was Scrutchfield. He had already dismounted and stood over the grave.

But none of the other troopers listened, even though Scrutchfield said they were likely to make "bad medicine" if they dug up this Indian grave.

In fact, the others jeered Scrutchfield and they dug up the grave anyway, and they found the body of a young Kickapoo woman. She was carefully dressed in clean buckskins, and she wore many colorful trinkets.

Captain Gillentine let his men divide up the trinkets and buckskin among themselves, and the troopers proudly displayed their booty to ornament their otherwise disgusting attire.

Then Captain Gillentine sent word to the big Texas outfit at Fort Chadbourne. The Confederates were itching to kill Kickapoos, as always, but the Kickapoos themselves had no idea they were in danger.

All the Texas troopers met up in Concho country, close to Dove Creek. There was Captain S.S. Totten and his militia of murderous rangers. There was Captain Henry Fossett too. He commanded the regular Confederate Army from Fort Chadbourne. All together their fighting force was numbered at 400 mounted and armed soldiers. So they got to the Kickapoo camp on Dove Creek.

It was January 8, 1865. The Confederate scouts found the camp was unguarded. It stretched out about one quarter mile along Dove Creek, under a fresh blanket of snow. The Kickapoo horse herd was resting peacefully in a nearby draw. Captains Fossett and Totten were licking their lips. Fossett said he would attack from the south end of the camp, sending half his cavalry to steal the Kickapoo horses and half with him to rout the camp. Totten agreed, and he boasted that he would storm in from the north end of the camp and meet Fossett in the middle, burning every lodge along the way.

So, the Confederate Texans got themselves all fired up and moved like wolves on the unsuspecting Me-thu-de-ne-nia. The surprise attack caught our peaceful travelers off guard. But not for too long.

One of our men took his two children by the hand and walked out to meet the Confederate troops. Our Kickapoo man came out with his children and

walked right up to Captain Fossett, and he sued for peace.

"We are friendly Indians," he said. "Come with me and speak with our chiefs."

But Fossett replied that he recognized no friendly Indians on the frontier. He told our Kickapoo man that he and the children were his prisoners. Then Fossett shot the Kickapoo man in the forehead. He was going to shoot the children too, but the rest of our warriors grabbed their rifles and ammunition and they ran for the brush to hide in the ravines.

From there they withered and whittled the Texans with their long-range shooting. Thirty of Totten's militia were killed instantly. Then the fighting got close-in for maybe thirty minutes before all the Texans buckled at once and ran for their lives.

Our Kickapoos chased them, pulling many off their mounts and cutting them down. Fossett's boys couldn't get to the Kickapoo horse herd either.

By late in the day, two of the Texans left standing were Scrutchfield and a scout named James K. Greer. Scrutchfield and Greer examined the Confederate survivors and concluded that every ranger wearing a trinket had been killed. But the Me-thu-de-ne-nia did not know they had routed the Texans. They believed that many more troops were coming to destroy them. So, they packed up what little things they could carry on the run (leaving behind buffalo robes, plunder and large quantities of dried meat) and they hurried through the snowstorm, heading downstream to the border. They finally came to my camp in Nacimiento, and they told us

about the dreadful Texans, and we all decided that the Texans had declared war on us.

I figured it was fucking over. But if you really think about it, every moment this world is fucking over and spinning around again too. So many different directions and loops. The earth is turning and we don't fly off. Also, at the very same moment, the earth is rotating around the sun. The sun itself is rolling around inside a universe of many rolling suns. Wheels are turning constantly, even under my bus. Wheels are turning inside the fucking engine. Water is rolling around in the oceans. In the tides. Water is rolling all night in the hidden rivers and underground streams.

And in the mountains, water is rolling over cliffs and cutting through canyons and no one sees it or even listens to it as it rolls toward the sea maybe under a thunderstorm. I am not hardly in a solid state neither. Inside me all this stuff is rolling and bouncing around too, and where are the borders between me and this bus, or between me and Bee? Like, if you lay in a field, or in the desert, or even on your own dirt floor or even on your own soft bed, then you can picture the movement around you and inside you, constantly rolling through you and spinning you around all which-a-ways. Pulleys and pistons and gears spinning and grinding in the hot grease of a garbage truck on the round roads outside. The clouds constantly swelling and rolling over your head and underneath you, even as you turn round in your sleep, and the sacred winds and the rain falling, drying up,

and becoming clouds again in an infinite number of fucking disguises that move in circle patterns along with you, like pacing you. And the animals and birds and fish and frogs and the little bugs. The ones you can't even see. And the tiny little things with wires inside them that make up everything. Spinning little fuckers. All spinning too. And what's inside them? More spinners, always blurring and moving and vibrating and shooting around. And the invisible stuff too, like the radio waves and the microwaves and the gamma rays. Bouncing the fuck around.

Like once I was in the Grand Canyon, hiking up from the bottom. I stayed all night off the trail in the old ruins of an ancient people. And when the sun rose it came through a slot in the rock on the far side of the canyon and lit up a long row of ancient dwellings in a pattern of light that was moving like shuffling pages in an ancient book. How did they build this miracle? You could only see it at dawn. Nobody was there but me. The sun rays opening shuffle had led me to a hidden city. But the other side of the ball always rolls in too. The fucking hate looks, and the looks that don't care, with their cold ray guns and their dead-shit eyes. And if not with you, or beside you, or you yourself even, then you can be sure that somewhere somebody has gone crazy and done terrible things, like stealing and killing and raping. And cheating. People keep cheating and tricking one another. Around in a circle we go, looping like birds of prey. Like fucking *zopilotes*. Yeah, like fuckin red-ass buzzards. Red-asses. White men.

You can hear it on the radio. Or you can see it in your own damn life. That's fucking part of it too.

So, what the fuck do you do? In all this fucking hoopla there is one small part you might miss. But it is the true and beautiful Kickapoo people of *Nacimiento*, living as they have always lived, doing favors and helping each other, even though they don't have to or even want to. Like take me as I drove to Dove Creek. I was pilot of the Jesuit school bus. The white bus rolling through the fucking Texas dust. The Kickapoos had taken me in and counted me as one of their own, even though they didn't have to or even want to.

So, the long afternoon on the road had turned into night, and the Jesuit school bus was needing a fueling, so I pulled into a south Texas 7-11. You know the ones. Those fucking convenience stores are such ugly mothers, filled with all kinds of crap that gives you cancer, and all of it under those fucking fluorescent lights that hum like beetles getting fat on death. But when I went in with Bee it was different. Everything looked like fun. Bee made it glow. Kind of. Like I had entered into this interesting place where you could be surprised and laugh about anything. The colors of things. The plastic wrappers and shiny silver stuff. The tiny items of trash that gleamed like trinkets.

Kickapoo Warriors

Na-Ná-He

Like I told you, *Señorini*, all things belong to *na-ná-he*, which is what you call *wilderness,* like nature, and all things come from it too. And because all things come from the wilderness, a man or a woman could be chosen by the wilderness to exploit the wilderness, which is strange, to be sure, but true, as you can see every day when you look all around you.

And then you see *na-ná-he* getting torn up and flattened and ground into dust. Pollution. And then you see chemical ponds with radioactive sewers, flooding out germs from the arsenals (which are the sacred shrines of the Texans).

This unlucky person (the one chosen by the wilderness to exploit the wilderness) is probably a Texan. Most likely. Or somebody else, or anybody else who has been chosen by the wilderness. And so he or she can no longer talk with all the world's things. This poor person, this exploiter, whoever it is, can't speak the same dialect.

Like I say, if this unlucky person is chosen to exploit the wilderness (even though the wilderness itself made the choice) then this person loses the channels of communication with all the world's things.

It's complex, *hombre. No comprende.*

But *If*, I say, *if*. Only *if* this person is chosen by the wilderness. That's *na-ná-he.*

I hope I don't get picked.

So, I've got to protect myself, and that's why I like to wash myself in the *río* where *na-ná-he* lives so happily. It's a pure *río*, *hombre*. Like at dawn or something. There I am. Way up in the Blue Mountains. And you can drink it too, *hombre*, you can. Most people won't be seeing and tasting that. But you can, *hombre*. Don't worry. You're not sick. You're not melting. You're lucky, *hombre*, real lucky. Most people will be melting, but not you. ('Melting' is how we say someone is sick with diarrhea. Like we say, "Uh oh, he's melting.") But you won't be sick, *hombre*. Our *río* is clean. *Na-ná-he* has chosen it for us. *Na-ná-he* chose us to be here today, drinking this water, but not to exploit it. So, we can still talk with all the world's things. And we can listen too. What do *you* hear, *señorini*? *Sus-ke-ne-thi*? What's that?

Sus-Ki-Ne-Thi

Well, *hombre*, who knows? But I will tell you something about *Sus-ke-ne-thi*. After all, here we are again. *Otra vez mi* Flintstone car is broken down. (Yes, once again my stone-age car is broken down.) And we're way out in the dark-branched chaparral, the *chaparrito prieto,* and we're cooking some *café* at night. All alone, way out here. Good coffee. What could be a better place for us to talk about the one I shot today and the one you're still trying to shoot tomorrow?

Keep your eyes open. He may come walking right up to join us. If he does, hit him good. You'll know him, all right. He's *Sus-ki-ne-thi*. That's deer buck, you know? Like *pe-se-que-thia*. That means the deer. Yes, *hombre*, you got it, but you got to understand a little bit about *Sus-ki-ne-thi.*

He wants to become people. He loves it. That is why he comes around so much. He takes the risk. Because even more than life itself, he loves to be people, yeah, people just like us Kickapoos, and maybe even like you *Señorinis* too. Who knows?

But he is the friendly and beautiful *pe-se-que-thia* who longs in his heart to be our meat for us, and so he comes around and asks us to kill him and eat him up, so he can become *Me-thu-de-ne-nia*, the People, which is us, the Kickapoos.

Just like that, *hombre*. It's a very special thing for these people, these Kickapoos, and for *Sus-ki-ne-thi* too.

It's like religion. Four times this happens. Four times he comes around, and we got to kill him and eat him four times too, and then he gets his chance to become people like us, *Me-thu-de-ne-nia.*

So, *Señorini*, I seen you trying to shoot him today, but you've got it all wrong. You shoot but you don't hit. You've got to hit him too, or else you'll be hungrier and he'll have to keep coming around.

Listen, *hombre*, when you miss so clean like that it's as if you turn your back on the God or something. That's why he gives you that *hondo* look. Yeah, deep look. *Muy hondo*. Very deep. That's why he runs away. Because he doen't trust you, *Señorini*. He wants you to do it right; to shoot and to hit too. Get that much straight and you'll understand our *pe-se-que-thia Sus-ki-ne-thi mucho mejor.* Yes, much better. *Mucho muy mejor.*

Shining *Pe-Se-Que-Thia*

Here we are, *hombre*. Just us two. It's gotten dark all round us. So we're sitting by the fire, roasting deer meat. Tastes good. Yes, I agree. Tastes real good.

Hey, where did they come from? Look at those two guys over there. They're *mucho hombres*. They're warriors too. It's Kickapoo Juice: Julián and José Garza. They're going to find *Sus-ke-ne-thi* tonight.

See how they got those shining-lights rigged up on their heads like miners in the old days. See how those batteries are attached to their army belts. And see how they got those wires running up their backs. Then the wires go around their heads and into the lights. Those lights shine out into *Sus-ki-ne-thi's* eyes. He gets blinded by them and stands real still. Very still. Then they can hit him. Wouldn't you?

Sí, pretty soon those two guys will be lost out there in the *chaparrito prieto*, hungry for *Sus-ki-ne-thi*, and he won't let them down neither. He'll pass into the beam of their lights and stare back at them. His eyes will be gleaming like pure silver *pesos*.

You better believe it. You'll hear a shot and a hit too. Those guys know how to keep wide-open their ears and eyes and hearts, even in the night, just so *Sus-ki-ne-thi* will come to them, *Señorini*, if nobody gets electrocuted first. *Sí, hombre, sí. No comprende, señor. No comprende.*

And look at this, when José Garza hits *Sus-ki-ne-thi* then he must cut up the meat, right there in the *chaparrito prieto*. This is what he does. You saw him. He carries the meat and we help him carry the meat, but we don't take the head and horns. José places the head so the eyes look to the east, wide open, and the horns rise up in perfect shape, and the red bloom from *Sus-ki-ne-thi's* neck is right there beside him on the green leaves and bare brown ground. And José pays his true respects to *Sus-ki-ne-thi*, and he scatters some foods and herbs and maybe tobacco before him, like praying. And José talks to him and he sings to him. And *Sus-ki-ne-thi* has maybe come home to us at this time.

Julían Y José

One time I went out there alone at night, into the *chaparrito prieto*, just like Julián and José, seeking *Sus-ki-ne-thi* because he was seeking me, both of us far into those Blue Mountains, you know? I had my *batería* and my belt and my headlamp and my wires. I was ready, but I'd been gone too long, maybe five hours, and my *bateriía* was losing power. Then it went out on me. Jesus Christ! Minutes went by. It felt like years at the bottom of a well. It was *muy* dark, *señor,* like a Seminole *princesa*, you know? *No comprende*.

Then I feel something. It reaches out from nowhere and touches me. It runs right across me and right in front of me, like brushing on my cheeks and my nose. I think, Jesus Christ! It's like a cold bone. Some giant old ugly thing. Don't talk about it, *hombre*. Then it's gone, but not far. It's watching me. Close by.

I think there's plenty more out there in the Blue Mountains than just *Sus-ke-ne-thi* and me, plenty more than just what's living and looking for each other, and *Sus-ke-ne-thi* knows it too.

Gracias Kit-si-ata.

Keh-pii-chi-ih Kit-si-ata.

Yeah. That means thank you. Thank you to the God. Yeah, maybe it's better to let the night be the night and for you and me to eat this good deer meat and drink this good *café*, and we'll count on hitting *Sus-ke-ne-thi*

again in the morning. Why not, *hombre*? What do you say, *Señorini*?

And those two guys, Julián and José, see them? Their lights have almost faded away. They're way out there. Too deep they have gone into the dark-branched chaparral. *Muy hondo.* Into the *chaparrito prieto* that's got no real end. There now. All gone.

The Seven Brothers are up in the sky too. What do you call them? Big Dipper? Yeah, I call them the Seven Friends. Did I tell you that those two guys, Julián and José, they are working up north by the Fort Lupton area. I mean right now. They're up there in Colorado. Topping onions. How did they get way down here in *Coahuila*, maybe a thousand miles from Fort Lupton? But they are here too. Right here in this *Nacimiento* area. You just saw them right around here, seeking *Sus-ki-ne-thi,* just as we seek him and he seeks us. But how can those two Kickapoo warriors be out here in the *chaparrito prieto* and up there in the Fort Lupton area at the very same time? I don't know, *hombre*. A lot of strange things maybe happening around here.

Las Problemitas

What are you going to do? *No comprende, señor*. *Oh, no comprende.* Well, I'll tell you what, *Señorini-Señorini*, put these cans upright in the fire. Let's put some of the *huizache* branches in there too. And let's take a couple of them *huizaches* that are green and straight and lay them over the tops of the cans, like this, see? So now we got us a little tin can *huizache* grill. *Mag-ni-fi-que! Fan-tas-ti-que!* Maybe you'd like to get on that grill and fry yourself, hey?

No, not really, *hombre*. Just kidding. You got *las problemitas.* That's even worse than melting. What do you do when you got a *problema*, a really serious problem, and you need to feel better right away? What we do is go off hunting in the mountains. That's what the men do. *Pe-se-que-thia.*

We go way out over there by those Blue Mountains. Way out there, *hombre.* Far into the midnight chaparral. Yeah. Those hills right there. Just walking into the *chaparrito prieto.* And then we like disappear. That's where a man goes when he's too lost inside his own heart to remember what life can be like for him. When he comes back he's alright. Things have changed behind him all the time he's been out there walking around. Maybe he finally comes back to himself by the last edge of the green and blue hills, so when he returns he feels completely normal, like everything's back in place and where it should be, just like it was

before that serious *problema* came like dancing into his heart. He's new.

Señor, I see you have got maybe the most terrible kind of *problema*. You've just discovered you're a white man. No, just kidding you. You've got something even worse. I've had it. I know. It eats you up like you're sweet, *hombre*, but you're not. You're sour. How come? Hey, maybe nothing is like what that woman can do to you when she decides to let you go, but you love her still, just the same as before, maybe even more so, but now she's walking with someone else. I been there.

That's a good time to go out hunting and walking around by yourself way deep into those Blue Mountains. That's why we come here now. You see, here's *pe-se-que-thia*. Take some, *hombre*. Eat it. Don't be shy. He takes the risk for you, and now you know why.

Cedro

Sí, señor, poco a poco, little by little, the things I knew one time are slipping away from me, especially since I had my stroke in '91. Yeah. Cancer in '81 and stroke in '91. But that's me. Slipping away from you. You'll come to visit me one day and I'll be introduced to you, but I won't even know who you are. Or even if I do, I might say, "Hey, who is this *Señorini*?"

But there was this other guy too, you know? His name was *Cedro*. He was like me. He wanted something very badly. It was a dream he wanted. Like a special dream that he was after. Searching for it. Pursuing it. You always got to pursue.

Cedro had to go through six years of punishment to go toward his dream. The first two years he had to punish himself to get rid of his bad dreams. He had to make sure that all his bad dreams would be gone from his heart. Completely gone.

So, he had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and he was not able to sleep. It was like a self-punishment. Then after the first two years he started to have some good dreams. But they didn't last. He had some good ones to start, but then they lapsed back into bad dreams. The bad dreams took over again. He was as far away from his goal as ever. So, he had to return to punishing himself. Nothing to eat, nothing to drink, not being able to sleep, no women. This went on. Another two years went by.

The good dreams came again, and they remained good. And the bad dreams never returned. Now he set out on a journey into *na-ná-he*, deep into the *bosque* around where he was living. He really went in there. Like he was going into a *cueva* (yes, cave) with no end in sight. He kept travelling. Dark-branched *chaparrito* everywhere he turned. Soon, everyone believed he was gone for good, and no one spoke his name or even talked about him with their eyes. For two more years *Cedro* was travelling alone and forgotten like this. Always walking. He loved to walk.

Then suddenly he came to the God, who asked him what he wanted to be, or what was the special kind of dream he was pursuing so badly. *Cedro* replied that he really only wanted one thing: Eternal Life. He wanted to be immortal.

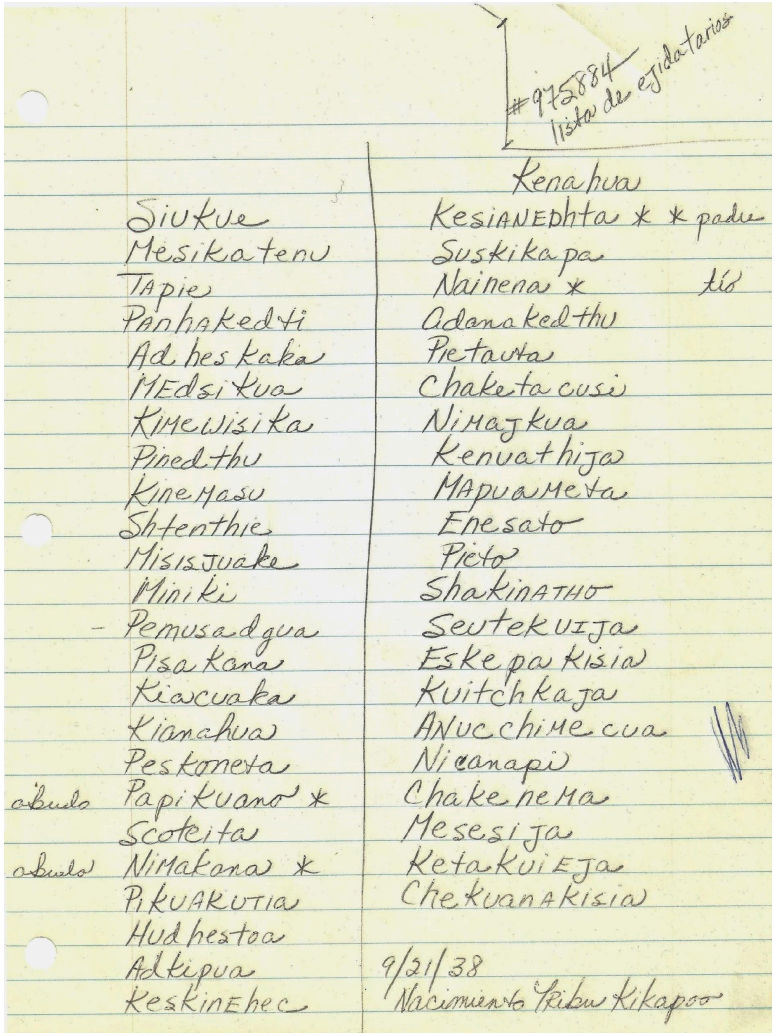
The God had some kind of problem with his request because the God could only give a longer life, but not an eternal life. That's why the God made him into *El Cedro*, the cedar tree. *Cedro* could not move around anymore, but he could live longer. That's how we know our Granpa is the cedar*. El Cedro*. That's why we know the leaves and trees are alive. All these wild plants that grow around here. They are our Granpas and Uncles. *Sí, hombre*. Take a good look around. All this. All these trees and animals and even the tiny ants here in *Naci*. They are our Granpas and Uncles.

Now, the white people want us to respect their religion when they don't respect it themselves. One after another, they came to us and asked us to try it out. So,

we'd try it. We'd see if it was good for us. But there were too many religions and churches.

We don't ask you to believe our religion. We don't tell you very much about it. That's none of your business. We don't say our religion is the best. But it's something. At least it's a religious belief. And it's not to be used until you really need it.

Kickapoo leaders of Nacimiento, 1938. Kesianedtha was the father of Ekoneskaka. Nainena was his uncle, and Papikuano and Nimakana were his grandfathers. (Hand copied from original.)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Lista de ejidatarios

	Kenahua
Siukue	Kesianedhta * * padre
Mesikatenu	Suskikapa
Tapie	Nainena * tío
Panhaked-ti	Adanaked-thu
Ad. hes kaka	Pietawta
MEdsikua	Chaketa cusi
Kimewisika	Nimajkua
Pined-thu	Kenvathija
Kinemasu	MApuaMeta
Shtenthie	Enesato
Misisjuake	Picto
Miniki	ShakinATHO
- Pemusadgua	Seutekuija
Pisakana	Eskepa Kisia
Kiacuaka	Kuitchkaja
Kianahua	ANucchiMecua
Peskoneta	Nicanapi
abuelo Papikuano *	Chakenema
Scotcita	Mesesija
abuelo Nimakana *	Ketakuiеja
PiKUAKUTIa	Chekuanakisia
Hudhestoa	
Adkipua	9/21/38
KeskinEhec	Nacimiento Tribu Kikapoo